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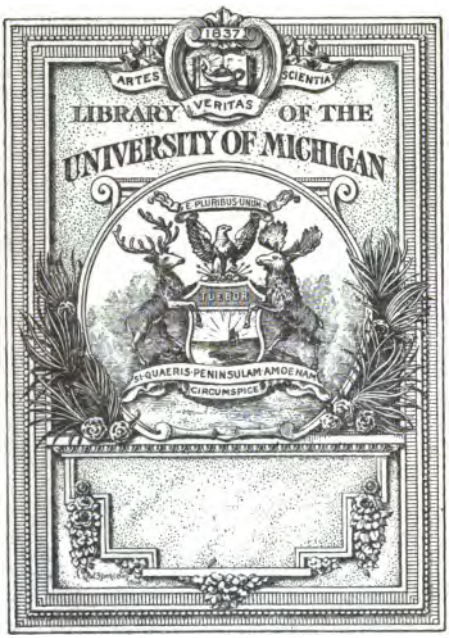
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

La plupart des hommes ne connaissent pas ce monde qu'ils ont toujours sous les yeux; par la raison qui fait que les hannetons ne savent pas l'histoire naturelle.—Boufflers.

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POSTHUMOUS MEMOIRS

OF A

PEERESS.

EDITED BY LADY CHARLOTTE BURY.

CHAPTER I.

It is a melancholy fact that people seldom set about the task of recollecting, till their memory begins to fail. Autobiographies are usually an act of dotage, attempted when the evening of life renders us dull and drowsy; and Death, in prognosticating to Mrs. Thrale's "Old Dobson," lameness, deafness, blindness, omitted the surest of all symptoms,—prosiness—as warnings of his end,—the moral origin of all self-edited memoirs!

The other day, accordingly, when I detected my grandniece, Lady Susan, yawning aside at an anecdote which I fancied I was relating with more than ordinary piquancy, said I to myself, "I am growing tedious, I am repeating myself; now or never I must write my memoirs."

To preserve some memory of the times I have lived in, has long been one of my favourite projects; and, before I dwindle into imbecility, I would fain bequeath a word to

the wise of the coming generation, lest they pique themselves upon too vast an improvement on the wisdom of the generation preceding. "Truth," say the philosophers, "is not to be told at all times." But told it surely ought to be in times like the present, when codes in supercession of the Decologue are erecting on all sides, and the world is learning to spell in order that it may teach to read.

I was born of what is called a good family, in one of the midland counties of England. We were great people in our own parish,—greater in our own park. I recollect believing my father to be one of the most important personages in England. Yet he wrote himself a simple Esquire, and his rent-roll scarcely exceeded two thousand per annum! Fortunes have wonderfully increased of late years. England, which, like some chaffering old Jew, buys and sells with the whole universe, a gainer by every bargain, has now incalculable hoards in her odd holes and corners—old stockings, and weazel-skin purses. In these days, every body is rich. Like the furniture of Dunham-Massey, in addition to state services and buffets of plate, we have shovels and pokers of solid silver. Our haberdashers and jewellers are now as wealthy as Rothschild, and Rothschild as Crœsus.

It was not so seventy years ago, when my father, squire Mordaunt of Spetchingley, was the first man in his neighbourhood. My birth, the date of which, thanks to the irregularities of parish registry in England, will never be exactly ascertained, occurred about four years after that of his late Majesty. One of my earliest impressions is that of royal popularity—the God-save-great-George-our-Kingism, now verging into oblivion. This affords proof that I must have speedily followed the Prince of Wales into the world; for, within a few years of their union, the young king and queen, so warmly welcomed on their accession, were "sailing in the North" of national favour. High as politics have run in later days, never did the Hecate of the civilized world weave her spells with blacker influence than during my childhood. The country-squirehood of the times of Wilkes and Liberty perpetuated the youth of their political squabbles by magic baths of fiery port; toasting where now they argue. The "True Briton" was drunk (dead drunk) at my father's table, till I suspected the names of Whig and Tory to be synonymous with the sign of the beast.

At my father's table, however, the port was claret, and excess (at any other suggestion than that of politics) studiously discouraged; for the gentility of the Mordaunts of Spetchingley had been exalted by aristocratic alliance. My mother, Lady Betty Mordaunt, was a daughter of the Earl of Rawborne, who, with half a dozen others to dispose of, was forced to mark his moderate estimation of the gift, by bestowing her hand upon a Leicestershire squire. My mother readily forgave the injury; for she was a thoroughly good soul, who lived only to love her house and home, her husband and children. Her education had been of the limited nature bestowed in those days on the superabounding daughters of a needy Scottish earl. She new only that which she had heard or seen. Even "a little learning" was a peril she had not encountered. I never observed a book in her hand, and doubt whether Lady Betty could have expounded even the names of those arts and sciences so familiarly professed by her grand-children.

I had two sisters and a brother younger than myself,—two brothers older. We were a happy family. Our childhood, with the exception of the spring physic indicated by Lanesberg's Almanack to nurse and groom, was rarely visited by a dose; and our school-room was untormented with back-boards. My father provided us with ponies to scamper over the park, my mother with a governess not likely to put her own ignorance to shame. The squire called us "the girls," Lady Betty "the young ladies;" and so we grew up in peace and simplicity, till, in my sixteenth year, I was fated to weep over the death-bed of my excellent mother.

This affliction made a woman of me at once. In her dying moments, my mother, calling me to her side, bade me watch over Jane and Helen, and be a comfort to my father. And so I trust I was. From the week succeeding his widowhood, his first care, when he entered the hall on his return from hunting, was to call aloud for "Lizzy. I was never called "Betty" again at Spetchingley after the loss of my mother. For every one loved her!—husband, children, servants, poor;—brilliant qualities or dazzling talents are not necessary to endear us to our fellow creatures.

Very soon after the death of Lady Betty, however, Squire Mordaunt became once more every inch a squire; —the claret once more port, and every glass a bumper. But for the conviviality, indeed, with which he rendered

Spetchingley attractive to his neighbours, the dulness of his life might have too sadly attested the extent of the loss he had sustained; for my brothers were away at college,—Jane and Helen still children. At length, in the midst of politics and potations, some officious brother squire suggested, that Miss Elizabeth was still too young to assume the head of his house,—rallied him on his doleful countenance,—and bade him take another wife, and be a man again.

The advice came late,—he had been already three weeks married; and his doleful countenance arose from the difficulty of announcing to his daughters, that he had selected their governess to be Mrs. Mordaunt of Spetchingley.

For my own part, I was too much surprised, when at last the secret was unfolded, to display much displeasure. But step-mothers have a prescriptive claim to detestation; and I soon learned from the old nurse and housekeeper, who had looked forward to my easy domination over the establishment, that mine was a monster. I became rebellious; I incited others to rebellion. My brothers wrote insulting letters on the subject,—my sisters and myself exhibited a most unfilial disrespect towards the intruder, till we made my father miserable and Mrs. Mordaunt resentful.

She had prepared herself, I verily believe, for kindness and moderation. But we would not hear of being well-used; we insisted on having a tyrant and a tyrant we had. No more ponies, no more indulgence; but abundance of grammar and history, to wreak the school-room vengeance of the governess-squiress. One day, about six months after the avowal of his clandestine marriage, my father called for me, according to his old custom, on his return from hunting; but I was sullen, and scorned to reply. I had taken refuge, as I always did when offended, in my mother's dressing-room, in which, as it had remained untouched since the death of Lady Betty, my step-mother never presumed to make her appearance. There was some thing in its cold, glazed, unoccupied neatness, painful to the eye, and in unhappy accordance with my temper of mind, when disposed to resist the authority of my father's wife.

On the present occasion, to my great surprise, my father pursued me to my sacred retreat; but too much excited by the object of his interview to notice the perversity dictating its selection. He came to offer me an alternative for the authority of my step-mother.

"Lizzy," said he, "I wish you joy. You have an opportunity of making an excellent match. This morning, as I was riding to cover, Sir Robert Warley made proposals for you."

"Sir Robert Warley?"

"Sir Robert Warley of Speen Park. His father kept the famous Speenham hounds."

"Did I ever see him?"

"*Did* you ever!—Why he spent three days at Spetchingley last Christmas was a twelvemonth; and you sat betwixt him and Dick Mordaunt at dinner, the day the Winningtons dined here."

"I remember perfectly, now."

"Six thousand a-year good, and heir to Sir Richard Winnington. He will ride over to breakfast, to-morrow."

"You might as well spare him the trouble," said I calmly.

"The *trouble?*"

"By writing him word, sir, that it is out of my power to accept his proposals."

"The devil it is!—and why, pray?"

"Because I consider him ill-mannered, ill-tempered, and ill-looking."

My father, who had drawn me to the window-seat to make his communication, jumped up, when, in a decisive tone, I uttered this unequivocal opinion; and having clapped his hat on his head and uttered some unintelligible words,—of which I could only make out—"Sophy always said she was a queer one; I must go and consult Mrs. Mordaunt;" abruptly quitted the room.

When I met my family again at dinner, I had gained two inches in stature and importance; not by the refusal of the baronet, but by the opportunity of proving to my father and my ex-governess that I had a will of my own. There was, however, a personage at Spetchingley more disagreeable to me, if possible, than Mrs. Mordaunt; a poor relation and hanger-on of my father, who like him rode hard and drank hard, when he could ride and drink at the expense of other people. Dick Mordaunt, who had been called in his youth a devilish good fellow, was now in his middle-age called a devilish knowing fellow; and this knowingness constituted his offence in my eyes. The creature affected a significant saucy laugh whenever women were spoken of, for which I could have killed him;—and, on the day of my accession of dignity, having caught his eye as I

sat bridling with importance, he burst into a fit of laughter which provoked me into a fit of tears. Dick Mordaunt and my step-mother united, were certainly enough to have driven a less positive damsel into the arms of Sir Robert Warley!

Apparently they were not very ardently extended to receive me. After one more appeal to my better judgment in favour of Speen Park, my father signified my negative; and, some months afterwards, the daughter of a neighbouring squire was elevated to the dignity of "Lady Warley." Meanwhile, the mere offer had opened a thousand prospects to my contemplation. I began to conjecture that, since I had made so important a conquest, I must be a pretty girl, and to fear that, with a father immersed in country-squirehood, and a step-mother suffering under the scorn and exclusion of the high-mightinesses of the county, my first adorer might prove my last. My seventeenth birthday found me in despair; for not a word was heard in the family of my "coming out." My brothers declined passing their college vacations at Spetchingley, so that I had no one to whom to confide my misgivings. Jane and Helen were too young for confidants, and I almost began to believe, what was plainly expressed in the significant glances of Dick Mordaunt,—"Miss Lizzy, you were a fool to refuse a good offer—the chances are that you will never get another."

But, in the midst of these evil auguries, my father called for me once more, with an open letter in his hand.—Another proposal!—not from a rich young baronet, but from a poor old aunt.

CHAPTER II.

SPETCHINGLEY, I fancy, rejoiced with an exceeding great joy, when it became known that my mother's widowed sister, Lady Carleton, was desirous that her eldest niece should become her inmate: my chittish airs having rendered me obnoxious to my father's second wife and second cousin. Dick Mordaunt laughed outright at the notion of my consorting with the great, and becoming a London lady; while the old servants made evident to the promoted governess, their delight at seeing Miss Mordaunt adopted by the family of their late beloved lady,—"their lady who was a lady born."

But, great as was the general satisfaction, mine was greater still. A whole night after my father's acceptance of Lady Carleton's proposal did I lie awake, revolving in my mind visions of stars and garters, balls and masquerades. Although a simple, a *very* simple country girl, an odd volume of Sir Charles Grandison, pertaining to the literary treasures of the housekeeper's room, had roused those latent instincts which long ago induced the poetical moralist to declare that

> Men, some to pleasure, some to business take,
> While every woman is at heart a rake.

Since the courtship of Sir Robert, I had considered myself a Harriet Byron, and he, my Greville. I now little doubted that legions of Pollexfens and Grandisons were waiting my arrival in town, to offer themselves as the bane and antidote of my matrimonial destinies.

Of Lady Carleton, my notions were vague and inconclusive. I remembered that divers of my mother's family had in my childhood visited Spetchingley; in particular, a certain aunt Clara, a tall meagre ungain creature, whose usual costume was a cravat and riding-habit. But, Lady Carleton's letter, of which my father had left me in possession, was signed "M. Carleton;" and, whatever else she might be, it was clear that Lord Carleton's widow was no Clara. To me she was London. The association between my aunt and the metropolis was at present too close to be

disunited. Thanks to her merciful interposition, I was *going* out of the country, and *coming* out in town!

Much, however, as for the last year I had detested Spetchingley, I found it impossible to leave it without regret. There were my two little sisters to be taken leave of, whom a dying mother had committed to my affection. There was my father; there were the old domestics,—the old walks,—the old avenues,—to all of which it were painful to say farewell. Even my stepmother seemed to improve at the moment of separation.

"May you enjoy health and happiness, Miss Mordaunt!" said she, taking my hand when the chaise containing the housekeeper, who was to escort me to London, appeared at the hall-door. "Evil counsel has created estrangement between us; but, should you ever need protection, you will find a mother in your father's wife."

"God bless you, Lizzy!" added my father, folding me tenderly in his arms. "Be obedient to your aunt Carleton; and, if you can, as good a woman as your mother."

Conscious that I scarcely merited so much forbearance, I was many miles on the London road before my compunctious visitings were tranquillized. The first thing that attracted my attention from recollections of home, was the lodge-gate of Speen Park. I could not forbear a smile as we passed. I was going where Sir Roberts were as plenty as blackberries; and blessed my stars that the world was still before me where to choose. My father had presented me with a purse containing a fifty pound note, and five guineas in gold; and a fine set of pearls belonging to my mother. Ignorant of the value of money, these treasures seemed inexhaustible; and, few people have changed horses at Barnet on their first entrance into London, with a more misjudging estimate of their own importance.

I had concluded that Lady Carleton's residence must be handsome and well situated: but the widows of Irish viscounts are often sadly "small deer," and I found her living in a shabby house in Jermyn-street. It was winter; and the smoky dingy atmosphere, and mean aspect of my future abode, damped the excitement of my spirits. My aunt, a tall hard-featured woman, curtsied formally on my entrance, and I discovered that I was to find protection instead of kindness, and tea instead of dinner. Lady Carleton's means were evidently small, or her economy great. Her establishment consisted in a plain waiting-

woman, named Phillis, a plainer cook, and a footman in a showy livery. All this differed widely from the old-English-gentleman style of living at Spetchingley; still more different was the shabby chilly attic in which I was installed, from my airy chamber at home, with its blazing fire and ample accommodations. I rejoiced that the proud old housekeeper had taken leave, and departed on a visit to her relations, so as not to witness the meagreness of Lady Carleton's hospitality.

Still, it was London:—in Jermyn-street, there was no usurping step-mother—no vulgar Dick Mordaunt. I was coming out—I was to be presented at court—I was independent. The next morning, I rose as soon as it was daylight—such daylight as it was!—Lady Carleton did not breakfast till eleven, and the only book I could discover was an odd volume called the Court Calendar, which at this period I held to be a barren catalogue of names. Before my dilatory relation made her appearance, I was quite sick of my studies, and almost of London.

"What an object the child is!" was her first remark to Phillis, upon whose arm she was leaning; "yet my nephew Harry assured me she was a beauty."

"We must make allowances, my lady, for a country-fied Miss," replied Phillis, in a patronizing tone. "Let us see what a new corset and Monsieur Rose can do for her, before we decide."

"*We!*" The waiting-woman then was to be admitted into the conclave, to whose decrees I was to be subjected:—*I*—Miss Mordaunt of Spetchingley—the daughter of Lady Betty—the niece of the Viscountess!

"Pray, child, what are your pursuits?" inquired Lady Carleton, startling me from my reverie as she sipped her transparent tea.—"Are you musical?"

"I am fond of music, but I have never learnt."

"Do you draw?"

"No, madam."

"You neither play nor draw?—at least you can dance?"

"I have never had a master."——

"Totally uneducated, I protest!" exclaimed my aunt, turning to Phillis, who waited at breakfast. "My poor sister seems to have strangely neglected her family. I am sure," she continued, addressing the waiting-woman, but glancing at me, "I don't know what is to be done with her!"

Lady Carleton's next inquiry regarded the state of

my finances. "The fifty pounds, which was of course intended for your personal expenses, you can give into *my* charge. The five guineas you may keep for pocket-money, but they must not be foolishly squandered," observed her ladyship in an authoritative tone; and, during the remainder of that first, dreary, dispiriting day, I was exhibited to visitors and measured by tradesmen, all of whom agreed with my aunt that at present I was not fit to be seen.

Such was the overthrow of the lofty structure my vanity had created!—My "Thrasonical brag," that I was to come, see, and conquer, was already laughed to scorn:—I was not even considered presentable!—I now began to dislike the London that despised me; and, but for the recollection of Dick Mordaunt's face, which I had discerned sneering over the park palings as I drove past, would have asked leave to return to Spetchingley.

I little suspected that my absence was a relief to all parties; that Miss Mordaunt's *hauteur* had been a source of daily vexation to my father and his wife. The girls were grown submissive on the loss of my bad example. Even the servants, unencouraged in their impertinence, were becoming respectful. Yet, as far as I can recal myself to mind, I was not by nature harsh or arrogant; and, under the straight-forward, affectionate management of Lady Betty, might have grown into an amiable woman. But my good qualities, like Ophelia's violets, "withered when my mother died."—Few among us justly estimate the value of a mother's influence in drawing forth the virtues of a child!

Another week in town, however, and my prospects brightened. Re-equipped and retouched by the hand of a fashionable coiffeur, even Mrs. Phillis admitted that my brother Henry's laudations were less exaggerated than she had supposed. I was voted passable, in my presence; in my absence, I suspect, something more; for my aunt announced her intention of having me presented at court without delay.

It is now just fifty years since, at seventeen, I commenced my study of the world. I have associated in my time with royal, gentle, simple,—the great, the little, and the middling, and have seen each successive epoch produce some temporary idolatry. At one time, saintship is in fashion,—at another scepticism; at one time liberalism, at another loyalty. At the period I arrived

in London, politics were in vogue, and political celebrities the rage. The handsomest man of the day, the richest, the noblest, the young Duke of Ancaster himself, would have been eclipsed, the moment, either Fox, Burke, or Fitzpatric appeared in company. Not that then, any more than now, the high priestesses of fashion cared a rush for the country or its constitution. But the Prince had embarked in a political career; the Prince (THE Prince!) was known to assemble at Carlton House the leading members of the Foxite party; and to be a countess, duchess, princess, was nothing, if unhonoured by the personal friendship of some eminent party-man.

Lady Carleton was in herself too little distinguished by beauty, wit, or fortune, to aspire to this; but she saw *those* who saw *them;* and, at second-hand, we were enabled to enjoy the *bon-mots* of Hare and Sheridan, or the gruff truisms of Thurlow. I had not been a month in town before her house acquired distinction in my eyes, far beyond that of my commodious hospitable home.

I was becoming familiar, too, with the surviving members of my mother's family. There was her brother, the old Earl of Rawborne, (a title enveloped in gout and flannels,—who, for any active duties he performed in the world, might have been for the last ten years a tenant of the family vault—) a widower with two sons, Lord Medway and Algernon Rawborne. There was my eldest Aunt, Lady Lavinia Shanstone, like Lady Carleton, a widow, but *unlike* Lady Carleton, a *rich* widow, and a saint. Two other sisters of Lady Betty had died unmarried. and one was the wife of a clergyman in the north of England: but of the youngest, the wife of Lord John De Vere, no mention ever escaped the lips of Lady Carleton.

"What has become of my aunt De Vere?" I ventured one day to inquire of my handsome and agreeable cousin, Algernon Rawborne, who had called in Jermyn Street during the absence of the viscountess; "I never see or hear of her among you!"

"You will never see or hear of her again," he replied, gravely.

"Indeed?"—

"Lady John De Veere is no longer in existence."

"Yet I cannot remember having worn mourning for her?"

"That is a duty still to be performed," replied Algernon,

laughing. "Lady John is metamorphosed, *not* into dust and ashes, but into a personage no less imposing than the Duchess of Rochester. Her husband's elder brother died unmarried last year, within a few months of the death of the duke, his father; and the new duchess is still at Paris, wearing off the freshness of her strawberry-leaves. We are expecting her every day."

"I rejoice to hear it. I have often wished to see her."

"You are presumptuous. The Duchess of Rochester is a person not to be seen for wishing it."

"But in our own family?"

"*T'here*, least of all, and *here* especially. She always detested Lady Carleton, as clever spoiled children are apt to detest cross elder sisters."

"In short, I am not likely to have a glimpse of her?"

"Certainly not;—you will probably see nothing else!—At Court,—at Almack's—at the Opera,—wherever beauty is worshipped, the Duchess shines a never-setting star."

"You are not very reverent in your allusions."

"Who cares for the beauty of his aunt, particularly with a cousin still more beautiful? By the way, do you know that you strikingly resemble Lady John? So much the better! "*Qui se ressemble, s'assemble!*"—and you would be far happier under *her* roof than in this abominable old ——Ha! my dear Lady Carleton!—how do you do? I did not hear you enter the room!" said Algernon, discreetly interrupting himself.

"I am quite well, I thank you," she replied, eyeing us with displeasure in her looks; while Algernon adroitly forestalled her purposed declaration of hostilities, by engaging her to dine in St. James's Square the following day. For my poor uncle, Rawborne, as I had already discovered, loved to have himself and his flannels rolled to the dinner table, and to fancy that himself and his flannels were enjoying the society of his family: and as, during the hunting season, Lord Medway ceded the control of the establishment in St. James's Square wholly to his brother, Algernon took care that my "poor dear sister Carleton," and my "poor dear niece Betty Mordaunt," should very frequently administer to the domestic happiness of the Earl.

In spite of the vigilance of Lady Carleton, Algernon contrived to visit Jermyn Street, whenever there was a chance of finding me alone; and a few days after the family dinner

party, we had another confidential interview, which confirmed the deep regard I was beginning to entertain for my cousin.

It appeared that a letter had been addressed to the coronet in flannels, by his godson Alfred Mordaunt, my youngest brother, entreating Lord Rawborne's interest with the Admiralty to procure him a commission; having got into some boyish scrape at Eton, which he did not desire to make known at Spetchingley.

"With an exclusive privilege of franking for my father," observed Algernon, "I felt entitled to use his name in addressing their Lordships in behalf of his godson; and here, my dear coz. is Alfred's appointment to the *Resolute*, a first-rate frigate, on the point of sailing for the Mediterranean. I have already communicated on the subject with Mr. Mordaunt, who, I trust, will raise no objections to my father's proposal of having Alfred in St. James's Square, to be fitted out in a manner becoming his godson."

"All this is the result of your own kind feelings, Mr. Rawborne?" said I. "How shall I thank you for my brother?"

"By calling me 'Algernon,' as a cousin ought," he replied; "and treating me with a little less ceremony."

Nor was this interposition in favour of my wild brother, a solitary instance of Algernon's good-will towards us. All he could do to enliven my monotonous mode of life, was done without ostentation.—He procured for Lady Carleton boxes for the play,—the opera; and became our escort whenever the conscientious discharge of his duties in St. James's Square admitted of his quitting his father. But Lady Carleton, though willing to accept dinners, breakfasts, suppers, and opera boxes, grew uneasy lest they should eventually excite in my bosom a tenderer sentiment than gratitude towards the donor.

"My nephew Algernon walked home with you, then?" —she inquired of me one Sunday morning, when herself indisposed for church.—"That young man is here too often. Have a care, child!—Algernon Rawborne is no match for you, nor you for him."

"Nor has he any inclination for me, madam, I assure you, nor I for him."

"Psha!—what should a country miss of eighteen know of the inclinations of a young man of wit and fashion about town?"

"*Is* my cousin Algernon a man of wit and fashion?"

said I in a scornful tone, piqued by Lady Carleton's allusion to my rusticity.

"On such points, Miss Mordaunt, bow to the authority of those more experienced than yourself. Algernon is a charming man, but he cannot afford to marry. My brother, Rawborne, as you may have heard, was born one of the poorest of his order. On succeeding at fifty years of age to his title, he was weak in mind, ordinary in person; too limited in income to reside at his family place,—too limited in abilities to augment it by professional or official distinctions. Under these difficulties, foolish as he was supposed to be, Lord Rawborne found wit enough for the wisest resolution in the world—he obtained the weight of his coronet in Bank Stock,—by marrying an heiress! We, his sisters, were too discreet to inquire whence she came;—whither she went was no secret in the family. The countess scarcely survived three years. After giving birth to two sons, she slept with our forefathers,—bequeathing to my brother the hoardings of her own!"

"But, by her death, Lord Rawborne must have become rich!"

"Immensely!—So possessed, however, was his narrow mind with an impression of the humiliations inseparable from an impoverished peerage, that on his marriage with Miss Moses—Joses—Samuel—Levi,—(I forget the woman's name!) he allowed her fortuue to be entailed with the title, without a shilling of provision for younger children;—so that had it not pleased Providence to remove Lady Rawborne, we might have had another brood of beggars, bearing the family name."

"But why, with Algernon's abilities, does he not embark in some professional career?"

"Like most clever people, the lad never had a grain of common sense!—My brother having married so late in life, was superannuated when his boys came to need control; and the younger, a pauper honourable, has been brought up in the enjoyment of twenty thousand a-year, with as comfortable a prospect of starvation as heart can desire."

"He relies, perhaps, on the brotherly kindness of Lord Medway?"

'He leans, then, on a reed that will pierce him:—Medway never wasted a thought on the interests of any living creature!—He is content to let Algernon live and rule in St. James's Square, that he may devote his own time to

sporting. But Algernon monopolizes the noble blood of the family, while Medway takes after his Israelitish ancestors in St. Mary Axe; and he is as capable of turning Algernon's situation to account, as the Brethren of Joseph of selling him to slavery."

"Poor Algernon!"

"Ay, ay!—pity him and welcome—so there be no love in the case. Having now fairly warned you, it will seriously displease me, child, should I find you encouraging *his attentions*."

There was no need, however, for alarm; my feelings were just then otherwise occupied. My brother Alfred, the young sailor, arrived in town, full of life and spirits, and a generous spirit of enterprise, which had rendered him from his birth a universal favourite; and, though it grieved me to see him devote himself to a profession of perils and privations, I was forced to admit that the boy had chosen wisely, and that the subordination of the navy was alone likely to subdue his wild recklessness of character.

Nothing could exceed the kindness with which he was welcomed in St. James's Square by his cousin Algernon; but his ship was already under sailing orders—and well do I remember the reprimand I received from Lady Carleton for the tears I shed on the day of his departure for Portsmouth; for, on the following morning, I was to make my first appearance at court, where red eyes afford no letter of recommendation.

I was to be presented by Lady Harefield, a distant relative of the Rawborne family, and a distinguished favourite of the King and Queen. A course of lessons from the celebrated Lepicque (minueteer to the courts of Versailles and St. James) prepared me for the august ceremonial; and, duly attired in presentation-white, and adorned with the petchingley Spearls, I raised my head, and, bridled with swan-like dignity, prepared to produce an unexampled sensation.

But sensations are things of rare occurrence in actual life. Whether singly or in a crowd, people are apt to be engrossed by themselves and their belongings, and indifferent to the triumphs of strangers; more particularly at court, where pride and egotism become sharpened by collision with each other. A few of those who happened to stand near me at St. James's, thought me perhaps a fine-looking girl, but unformed and awkward; while the rest

passed me by with a vacant stare, as part of the furniture of the place. I had at least sagacity to discover that no vanquished Strephon followed me with inquiring eyes to Lady Harefield's carriage; nor did it much disappoint me to learn, on the following day, that my *debut* was considered a failure; and that Boothby, or Hare, or Jekyll, or some other reigning wit, had amused the world of White's at my expense, by an odious *jeu de mot* about the redundance of bone in the Leicestershire breed,—the Dishley squiresses—no matter what!—the impertinence was scarcely worth repeating.

CHAPTER III.

We dined the following day in St. James's Square; when Lord Rawborne's carriage, which was always sent for us, followed to the door the stately equipage of Lady Lavinia Shanstone. As we watched her ascend the stairs, escorted by her two tall daughters, Clara and Lavinia, my aunt exclaimed in a peevish tone: "This is the first time my sister has found it convenient to drive here this winter!—I lay my life that Medway has arrived!"

"Is she so fond, then, of her nephew?"

"So fond, that she wants to make him her son-in-law. Those horrid girls have enormous fortunes; and Lady Lavinia is wild to have them form great matches."

"A saint, yet so ambitious?"

"A saint, because so ambitious. What but the desire of high distinction in Paradise, is the origin of saintship?"

"But fortune will not surely tempt the rich Lord Medway?"

"Jewish blood! It would never surprise me to see him marry one of the Shanstones."

My sanctimonious relatives added little to the conviviality of our family party. Lady Lavinia, a woman of narrow understanding, was the widow of a man rewarded by Government with a baronetcy for the same line of conduct in the East, which afterwards brought Warren Hastings into Westminster Hall. Sir Obadiah Shanstone, on his return from Bengal, thought to gloze over, in the eyes of man, the sin of his low extraction, by bribing into wedlock the daughter of an earl; and to gloze over in the eye of Heaven the sin of his oriental peculations, by trying to make a conventicle of the House of Commons, and assuming in the conventicle the dictatorial importance of a conscript father. But Sir Obadiah was gone to his long, —his *very* long, account; leaving to Lady Lavinia the disposal of his two tall daughters and a half a million of Oriental amassings. The girls were of an age to be presented in society; but, as prayer-meetings and religious dissipation had not then been introduced into fashionable

life, Lady Lavinia was perplexed in what way to reconcile her views for their aggrandizement with the forms of sanctity forced upon her adoption by her marriage. Lavinia, the eldest, was evidently a puritan at heart; but I sometimes fancied I detected a gleam in the dark eyes of my cousin Clara, indicative of the repressed gaiety of a child of perdition. In their mother's presence, however, both sisters maintained the rigid perpendicularity of the twin towers of Westminster Abbey!

All this was dull enough, and I was mortified at seeing, for the first time, Algernon reduced to the insignificance of a younger brother. Still more so when, in the course of the evening, I discovered the altered state of things established by Lord Medway's arrival. Algernon scrupulously refrained from rendering his father's dotage a spectacle to any but the near relatives of the family, while his brother seemed to keep open house. One after another, half-a-dozen young men, his favourite associates, dropped in;—talking of Newmarket,—White's,—jockey-club and green-room,—not to *us* indeed, but to *him;* and at length carrying him off to some of these favourite resorts. Lady Carleton looked indignant; and I expected every moment to hear Lady Lavinia burst forth into anathema. But she turned a deaf ear to the conversation; or rather turned *her* conversation to a deaf ear, by drawing close to the easy chair of the Earl, and directing a monologue to the flannels. It was not her cue to be either shocked or affronted by Lord Medway's proceedings.

At breakfast, next morning, while munching her scanty allotment of dry toast, Lady Carleton expressed her resentment of the unobservant indifference with which Lord Medway had received the presentation of his new cousin.

"His Lordship has my full forgiveness," said I, calmly.

"Very possibly; but the offence, child, was to *me*. Medway should have remembered that you were under *my* protection. But it is easy enough to trace the source of his contempt. He had doubtless heard Boothby's *bon-mot* about the Dishley breed."

"My cousin Algernon informs me," said I, "that Boothby's wit is merely traditional; that he is looked on at the clubs as obsolete."

"Your cousin Algernon!" interrupted my aunt in a rage: "a pretty authority, truly, to quote against me!"

"You told me the other day, madam, that Mr. Rawborne was a man of wit and fashion about town."

"I might have spared my pains. Girls are always ready enough to attribute importance to the first silly boy who calls them an angel."

"Had my cousin so wasted his politeness," said I, laughing, to conceal my vexation, "he would not have been altogether the first. When Sir Robert Warley proposed for me to my father, I believe he called me archangel."

"Sir Robert Warley *propose* for you!—Sir Robert Warley, of Speen Park?"

"Sir Robert Warley, of Speen and other Parks?"

"And your father allowed you to refuse such a match!"

And by degrees, the history in all its details was unfolded. The discovery was advantageous to me; for though it decided Lady Carleton that I was a greater fool than she had supposed me, it also tended to prove that I had attractions, which might still verify her projects for my advancement. Even Phillis became more gracious, after learning from her lady that a rent-roll of six thousand a year had been at my disposal.

Her ladyship's animadversions piqued me, however, into bestowing upon Algernon twice as much encouragement as my inclination would have suggested. Algernon was young, handsome, sprightly, gallant, kind; but his position relatively to myself was such as, with a nature so proud as mine, was decisive against falling in love. I stood towards Lord Rawborne's son in the light of a poor relation: *I*, the daughter of Mordaunt of Spetchingley—accustomed, by the local importance of the name, to fancy myself a great lady; *I*, as one of five younger children, inheriting my fifth of a settlement of £15,000; *I*, as the inmate on sufferance of a dowager-aunt—was reduced to the degradation of receiving courtesies and obligations at his hands; and to cherish a tender passion for one to whom I had been obliged to say "thank you" for benefits received, was not in my character.

A day or two after my presentation at court, Lady Harefield, compassionating perhaps my mortification, offered to chaperon me to one of the weekly balls of the King-street club, better known under the name of the proprietor, Mr. Almack; an ordeal more vital to my fashionable fame, than even the burning ploughshares of St. James's. All eagerness to display my Lepique-perfected minuet, and a hoop just thirty-three inches in diameter, I prepared my silver brocade, and submitted my side curls to the powder-puff; while Lady Carleton, whose dissipa-

tion had long been confined to drums and card-parties, saw me depart with a smile which the name of Sir Robert Warley had called up into her cheeks.

Four o'clock by the chimes of St. James's, ere I returned from the ball!—when Mrs. Phillis was at the pains of rendering her discontent at sitting up so audible, that I was summoned to the dowager's bed-side for a reprimand.

"What an object the child is!—Scarce a shade of powder left in her hair!"—she ejaculated. "Pray what do you mean, Miss Mordaunt, by keeping reasonable people out of their beds till this unreasonable hour?"

"Having no carriage, madam, I am dependent on the discretion of other people?"

"But Lady Harefield is never known to stay at a ball after two o'clock?"

"It was not Lady Harefield who brought me home."

"Not the chaperon I selected for you?—What is the meaning, pray, of all this?—What have you been about?"

"At two o'clock, Lady Harefield was preparing to go away, just as I had engaged myself for a minuet."

"To Mr. Algernon Rawborne, I make no doubt."

"No, madam;—to the Prince!"

"To Prince Stahremberg, pray, or Prince Castelcicala?"

"To neither, madam;—the Prince of Wales."

Lady Carleton was now wide awake; and even Mrs. Phillis suspended her grumbling.

"You danced with his Royal Highness?"

"I thought, madam, you would not be displeased at my quitting Lady Harefield's protection to fulfil such an engagement, particularly as the Duchess of Rochester undertook to bring me home."

"The Duchess of Rochester!"—reiterated my aunt, rubbing her eyes, as if to ascertain whether she were awake.

"I ought to ask your pardon for disturbing your rest," said I, preparing to retire. "We will talk over the ball at breakfast."

"As if I could sleep!—No, my dear child, I insist on hearing all. In the first place, how did you like Almack's?"

"Better than any thing I have seen in town,—so gay,—so brilliant—so"—

"Was my nephew Medway there?"

"He was;—and when Algernon"—

"Never mind Algernon;—I want to hear about the Duchess."

"We cannot reach her Grace without Algernon's assist-

ance. As I was moping disconsolately in the tea-room with Lady Harefield, my cousin approached, in conversation with a lady who had already attracted my attention as the handsomest woman at the ball, and whom I now heard exclaim in reply to his observations,—"my sister Betty's girl—a daughter of poor dear Lady Betty Mordaunt's?" —And, in a moment, my hands were clasped in hers, and the tears were starting from her eyes.

"I ought to have discovered you at once," said she, "by your likeness to a sister, whom I dearly loved. You are welcome to London; where, by the way, I am just now almost as much a stranger as yourself. What am I to call you?—'Betty,' I hope!—The old-fashioned name will remind me of my play-days."

"I used to be called so—but I became 'Lizzy,' after my mother's death."

"Right!"—interrupted the Duchess; "too much deference cannot be shown to the memory of a good mother. But, my dear child, I am detaining you from the dance. Have you a partner?"

I was forced to reply by a mortifying negative; and the Duchess issued her commands to Algernon to lead me out.

"Go and do your best," said she; "I want to ascertain all I have to be proud of in my niece."

Engrossed by my desire to excel under the Duchess's scrutiny, I did not raise my eyes towards her during the minuet; and, on returning to her side at the close, was wholly unprepared for the honour of a sudden presentation to the Prince of Wales, with whom she was in conversation.

"Then I lay my life you were as awkward as a milkmaid,"—cried Lady Carleton.

"I think not,—or his Royal Highness would scarcely have condescended to ask my hand for the following minuet."

"And after the minuet?"

"After the minuet, a miracle!—My cousin Medway found me grown worthy of becoming his partner; an honour for which I thought it my duty to acknowledge my obligation to the Duchess."

"Vastly bad taste, child, for a person of your years to indulge in the flippancy of a joke with a person"—

"Do not say of hers—if you hope for pardon, my dear aunt," interrupted I. "Besides, her grace seems ignorant

of the meaning of all seriousness. I never saw so lively a person."

"The liveliness of a fine set of teeth. A smile becomes her."

"In *her*, every thing seems becoming. She embraced me at parting, and expressed a hope (as I must be so great an incumbrance to yourself) to have me a great deal with her during my stay in town."

"Well—well,—enough of her grace's plans and perfections for to-night," said Lady Carleton, affecting a yawn. "Homely people, who do not dance with Royal Highnesses, are not fond of having their night's rest disturbed. We will talk of all this, to-morrow."

And I was forced to retire;—but not to sleep. If the nights preceding my removal from Spetchingley to London had been unquiet, what were the visions of splendour which *now* crowded on my aching sight! How much did my present prospects transcend all previous expectation! Hitherto my sojourn in the great Babylon had been a matter of disappointment. Lady Carleton's modes of life were wearisome; her society was composed of people, like herself, inclining to threescore; like herself poor and penurious; discontented old bachelors and old maids,—widows and widowers,—the ragged selvage of the aristocracy. To enable me to taste even sparingly of the pleasures of society, she was often forced to apply to chaperons who thought her troublesome; and I so long accustomed to courtesy and deference as the daughter of the Mordaunts of Spetchingley, found myself rejected by many, and a charge to all.

But now, all was to be reformed. The affectionate notice of the Duchess of Rochester, the queen of fashion and pleasure, would assign to me in society a place more consonant with my pretensions. Henceforward, London was to appear under a new aspect.

CHAPTER IV.

HAVING entered thus minutely into my family affairs, it is time my recollections should include that more extensive framework of society which surrounded the trivial group I have been describing. Yet, though London was then comparatively circumscribed, and the outworks of the great world were far more strongly set up against the approaches of aspiring opulence, society was less easy to collect into a focus. There existed, as in Paris, distinct societies of the court and the town: and Windsor Castle ate its roast mutton, while Carlton House fed upon devilled kidneys. Religion and politics, if less potential, were more polemic. People did not slide from a house where high church implied salvation, to one where low church was all in all; or glide from an assembly given by a Whig premier, to a ball graced by the blessed hierarchy of the Tories. There were as many divisions and subdivisions in society as there are canals in the city of Ghent, where a thousand bridges are indispensable to enable neighbour A. to live on neighbourly terms with neighbour B.

Under such disadvantages, a general picture of society must be less accurate than at the present time, when all is imitation,—all echo,—all tautology;—when "half the platform just reflects the other," and the aristocracy of rank stands grimacing like a posture-master on its pedestal, in order that its illegitimate brother, the aristocracy of wealth, may try to prove affinity by aping every contortion, and out-vaulting every leap.

Nevertheless, some generalities existed that serve to inscribe the epoch on my memory. Much as has been said of the demoralization of the higher classes during the decrepitude of George IV., the demoralization prevalent during his youth was far more remarkable. Paris, like a repentant Magdalen, affected just then, on the death of a vicious, and the accession of a virtuous sovereign, the most prudish propriety; and, as Horace Walpole used to say of France and England, that "like the sea and land, one could not gain without the other being a loser," the vices

put out of countenance by Louis XVI., took refuge under the protection of the Prince of Wales. Madame du Barri retreated into the obscurity of her pavilion at Luciennes, and the emblazoned chariot of a Perdita drove triumphantly through the parish of St. James.

From the days of Alcibiades, however, to those of Brummel, fine gentlemen have existed, like excrescences on the oak, the disease and not the product of the age. It is rather from the women, the matrons of the times, I would draw deductions of its morality; and I own that, in defiance of the example of a most domestic court, the noble ladies my contemporaries would have little to learn from the levities of their grand-daughters.

Though less graced with superficial accomplishments than the damsels of to-day, our reasoning faculties were at that time better cultivated. We performed no miraculous concertos, competed for no prizes at the Society of Arts; but we were the chosen associates of a Johnson, a Cowper, a Sheridan. We listened more,—we chattered less. But this superiority of intellectual cultivation added only a new page to the annals of gallantry. It was only the conversion of Laïs into Aspasia. From Mrs. Robinson to my lovely relative, the danger was but magnified through the atmosphere of refinement surrounding the meretricious charms of the goddess of voluptuousness.

In its highest circle of *haut ton*, London already emulated the witty profligacy of Paris under the sceptre of Louis XV., and the influence of a Boufflers and a Du Deffand. Of these, enough, and too much, has been consigned to us in the memoirs of their day. But, saving in the archives of Doctors' Commons, nothing remains to perpetuate the peccadilloes of our grandmothers; for England is a prude who, like the Spartan virgins, heeds not that her zone should be unbound, so it be done in silence and obscurity.

Nevertheless, a few septuagenarians, like myself, are not hypocritical enough to witness, unmoved, the canonization of our century. Like the devil's advocate-general, whose duty it is to plead against every new aspirant to the honours of the Kalendar, I lift up my voice to attest that the last age was a sinner in its generation; and, unmisled by maternal blindness or bitterness, have no hesitation in tracing the effeminacy and fatuity of certain lords of the creation and the realm of the present day, to the enervating and vicious habits of their progenitresses. When I

arrived in London, its ways were "pleasant but wrong." It was something, at least, that they *were* "pleasant:" for I have since found them "wrong," yet mightily disagreeable.

But, to return from great things to small, from great people to people infinitely little, I entered the breakfast-room of Lady Carleton, the morning after my unexpected introduction to my Duchess aunt, prepared for a storm; for on the stairs I had encountered Mistress Phillis, wearing her most smiling countenance, as was invariably the case when she had been stirring up the wrath of her lady.

"Almost noon!" she exclaimed, looking at her huge enamelled Tompion, as I made my appearance. "You have been dreaming, I suppose, of crowns and coronets?"

"I am now fully awake to the attractions of tea and toast," I replied, taking my accustomed place, and trying to look unconscious of her ill-humour.

"I have been reflecting, Miss Mordaunt, upon our conversation of last night," said my aunt, coming at once to the point, as she dashed, rather than dropped, the sugar into my cup, "and as an inexperienced young woman, unversed in the world and its ways, I feel it my duty strenuously to resist giving you up to the care of such a person as the Duchess of Rochester, without previously warning your father of the exact state of the case."

"Perhaps you will have the goodness, Madam, to apprize *me* of it in the first instance," said I, "for at present I have not the honour of understanding you."

"Miss Mordaunt, I am not in the humour to be trifled with; I allude to the proposal of the Duchess of Rochester to take you under her protection."

"This is the first I have heard of such a scheme."

"You certainly informed me this morning, on your return from Almack's——"

"That my aunt expressed herself anxious to conduce to the amusement of my season in town. Not a word of *taking*—not a word of *protection;* and even had there been a thousand, you cannot suppose me, Madam, so ungrateful as already to forget your promptitude in affording me a home, when my father's roof became distasteful."

"'Tis very well," said the Viscountess, somewhat mollified. "I am glad to find, child, that you see things in a proper light."

"I certainly, however, conceived, from the manner in

which I have heard your ladyship, and still more frequently Mrs. Phillis, enlarge upon the trouble and expense occasioned in your establishment by my residence here, that you would not be sorry if relieved from my presence."

"Certainly not," answered Lady C., conscious of her own meanness: "certainly not, had I any thing at heart but your permanent advantage. But the roof of the Duchess of Rochester is not one under which a girl—a mere child—can, with impunity, become an inmate. Rochester House is the head-quarters of the witty and wicked of the metropolis. Her grace is the high priestess of the *beaux esprits* and freethinkers of the day. Yes, child; strange as it may seem, I have one sister a disciple of Whitfield, and another of Voltaire;—two silly women, neither better nor worse than the rest of their sex."

"The Duchess," said I, more timidly, "talked of visiting you this morning. She has been but three days arrived from Paris——"

"Bringing with her an importation of fashions and follies enough to poison the morals of the whole parish! Did she say what would be worn in the way of hoods this spring?"

"She did not attempt to poison *me*. The Duchess, though beautifully dressed, seemed perfectly indifferent on such subjects."

"Simple must be the beauty who has not art enough to conceal her art!" retorted my aunt.

But, at that moment, the Rochester *vis-a-vis*, with its liveries of blue and silver, stopped at the door; and, preceded by a potent odour of *Maréchale* powder and two yelping, silken-haired lap-dogs, the lady we were so freely discussing flurried into the room.

"I have not a moment to stay. I am in the most miserable hurry. How do you do, Lady Carleton? You are looking a world of wonders younger and better than when I left England. I am come to borrow this poor child of you. You must lend her to me for Moses in the Bulrushes."

I was all astonishment; Lady Carleton equally bewildered.

"Your Grace is, of course, welcome to Miss Mordaunt's society," said she, stiffly. "The purport of your request, I suppose, I live too much out of the world to understand."

"I thought all London had heard of Sherwin's Moses?" said the Duchess.

"Neither of Sherwin nor his Moses. But no matter. A Moses, patronized by the Duchess of Rochester, is, doubtless, the fashion. Go, child; put on your hat and cloak, to accompany your aunt."

"Her aunt—Oh, horror of horrors!—Go, little girl—make haste: and show too much tact to brand me with a title so opprobrious."

I hastened to obey; and, on my return, found that the sisterly regard of the two ladies was scarcely sufficient to restrain them within terms of courtesy.

"I wish you joy, cried the Duchess, as we entered her carriage, and drove off at a tremendous pace. "I was happy to perceive in you, at first sight, a claim to the clear complexion and lofty presence of all possible Rawbornes; I find, on a second interview, that you rise superior to their virtues, since you can put up with that tiresome old woman, which I positively can *not*."

"Lady Carleton took compassion upon me, under the disagreeable circumstances of my father's second marriage."

"Don't make me detest her more," interrupted the Duchess, "by taking up her defence. You will put me out of humour, which will put me out of countenance, which will bring me to shame where I have promised myself to be brought to honour. In a moment, we shall be at Sherwin's;—Sherwin lodges at St. James's Street. There! look at all the carriages waiting at his door. I knew I should be too late."

I now recollected having heard this artist named by the friends of Lord Medway, when relating the gossip of the town that evening in St. James's Square, as young and self-educated, sinking, or rather rising, under the weight of aristocratic patronage. Three duchesses were in constant attendance on his easel! The elegance of his costume and style of life spoke of the patron rather than the patronized; and, while the painter busied himself in transmitting to posterity the smiles of the charmers around him, the charmers around him busied themselves in lavishing upon their immortalizer the brightest of their smiles.

The picture alluded to by the Duchess of Rochester, "The Finding of Moses," occupied just then the exclusive attention of Sherwin. An infant Hercules had dropped

from the skies, or the Foundling Hospital, to form the model for the babe; and the Princess Royal was to stand for the Egyptian Princess, surrounded by all that was fairest of the aristocracy, as her attendant maidens. In this attractive group, the Duchess of Rochester had been solicited to take a place; and it did not surprise me, when we hurried into Sherwin's painting-room where the sitting was already begun, and the Duchess of Devonshire and Rutland established in their parts, to observe the vexation produced in more than one beauteous countenance, by the arrival of her Grace.

"I am too late—you are admirably grouped—I, shall interrupt you," said the Duchess, affecting to retreat. But the artist, remembering the instructions he had received from his royal patron, insisted on detaining her: "a new maid of honour could easily be added to the household of Pharaoh's Daughter." Just, however, as the Duchess was fixed in her post of honour, it seemed to occur to Mr. Sherwin that two were more easily introduced than one; and, addressing himself to my aunt, he observed, pointing to myself, that "if that young lady would condescend to favour him, the adjustment of the group would be more perfect."

I was of course well pleased to attach myself to a company so distinguished. That day was devoted to the composition of the group. And what a fund of amusement for any rational being, to have entered the room where stood, in hoops, and powered *têtes* or *poufs*, a dozen of the finest ladies in the land, hating each other with indescribable hatred, but looking delightfully with all their might for the benefit of the maccaroni-artist, arrayed, as was the fashion of the day, in a scarlet coat, with nankeen shorts, and jockey boots! Such were the preparatory steps for "The Finding of Moses in the Bulrushes."

"All this has been very tiresome," said the Duchess, when we regained the carriage, "and if I am to read my face reflected in your own, we neither of us look the better for our attempts at beauty. We have sadly lost our time, too; for we must hasten home to dine, or the Duke will be late at the House, and you and I at the Pantheon."

"I fear I must beg you to take me to Germyn Street. Not having aprrized Lady Carleton——"

"Apprized!—Nonsense!—My sister knows you are under *my* domination. But if you are afraid of being

scolded black and blue, let us stop the carriage in Jermyn Street. 'John—my compliments to Lady Carleton, and Miss Mordaunt dines with me to-day. I will send her home at night."

I liked this peremptory mode of settling matters, as it happened to settle them in the way that suited me. "You need not ask for a change of dress," added the Duchess; "I dare say you have nothing belonging to you that is not horrible; and, as we are of a size, some of my Paris finery will do better."

The distance seemed considerable between Jermyn Street and Rochester House. I was not aware that the ancient mansion of the De Veres stood in so remote a a quarter as the neighbourhood of Montague House, now known as the British Museum, having been built "in the fieldes neare Pancrace," when not a mansion intervened between its spacious court and the Hamstead hills."

"I am trying to pursuade the Duke," said she, "to exchange this antediluvian mansion for one in Spring Gardens adjoining the Mall. We have here a vast garden, worth its weight—not in gold—but brick-earth, which would create half a parish on the spot. At present, we have scarcely subsided into our new dignities and possessions; but John, who is fond of Brookes's and Carlton House, as I of Almack's and the Opera, finds himself sadly isolated here, so that I have hope of success."

This was the first time I had heard mention of "John." From the recency of his father's death, and his accession to the title, I vaguely concluded him to be a young man; and was greatly surprised, on my presentation to the Duke of Rochester, to find him at least twenty years older than his wife,—a man of grave and imposing presence.

"Have we any one to dinner?" inquired his Grace, when he re-entered the drawing-room, attired with the last finish of Parisian elegance.

"No one. I expect the boys in the evening, to escort us to the Pantheon."

I was puzzled. Could the Duchess, young as she looked, have sons old enough to accompany us to a place of public resort? I took an early opportunity of solving my doubts.

"The boys my *sons*?" said she, laughing heartily. "My dear child! where is your Debrett? Before I was your age, I could have dated every member of the house of Raw-

borne to a year and a day, or rather to a day and a year. Begin, I beseech, your studies to-morrow, and you will find *me* Debretted at nine and twenty. Alas! that I should have to plead guilty to my thirtieth year!"

There certainly was no personal indication of the necessity. The Dutchess might have subtracted half a dozen years, and none but a rival beauty have gainsayed her. These "boys" of hers, must be of tender years;—and I now ventured to inquire their age.

"Still harping on my sons?—No! my dear Miss Mordaunt," said she, evidently in a tone of vexation, "I am not so fortunate as to be the mother of a son. I have daughters, (more almost than I care to acknowlege,) very much at your service, whenever you feel inclined to drive down to a rambling, old-fashioned villa of ours at Chelsea, where the five Lady De Veres, and five acres of flowerbeds, are I trust growing and blowing."

"You do not have them with you, then, in London?"

"I did not have them with me even at Paris. Children, like trees, do not bear transplanting till a certain age: every removal breaks in upon their system of health and education. My girls are destined to Beaufort Lodge for the next five years, when Lady Helena will be old enough to be presented, and her mother old enough to be a grandmother."

"Your Grace will perhaps take me, some day, to visit my little cousins?"

"Some day, when my Grace is in the mood maternal. I do not often go to Chelsea. My arrival throws governesses, nurses, and children, into confusion; their studies are discomposed for a week to come."

All this displeased me. I began to feel the truth of the Dutchess's tribute to the memory of my mother.—"We, Rawbornes are a heartless set,—Betty was the best of us!"—for without regard to the discomfiture of lessons or governess, I cannot remember the day of my early life, when less than a third of twenty-four hours was spent in the presence of my mother. Lady Betty Mordaunt would not have allowed a girl of us sleep from under her roof, to have endowed us with the learning of Anne Dacier, or Lady Jane Grey.

The Duchess noticed my reverie. "At the risk of repeating myself,—still harping on my sons!" she exclaimed, "know then that 'the boys' are my nephews,—Medway

and Algernon; who, for ten years of their life and mine, were as sons or brothers to me. Lord Rawborne (as with all your family ignorance you may happen to know) was the best-natured and poorest of peers, when, on his accession to his title, he sold his good-nature and poverty to a Jessica richer than all her tribe; and found worthy occupation for his new fortunes by taking under his roof the two orphan girls with which his father's second marriage had burthened the family. I and my sister Louisa (now wife to the Dean of Ripon) resided with him in St. James's Square from eight years old till eighteen; and, after the early death of their mother, those boys became our own. Louisa doats on Medway, I on Algernon; but in truth I love them both, and would fain repay them in affection the debt of kindness I owe their father. Lord Rawborne is morally dead, and unconscious of my good-will; the boys are bright and flourishing."

While she ran on in this way, the Duke ate his dinner in silence. But it was plain he liked to hear, and even see her talk. Strong affection and strong admiration were mingled in his looks. He was an indolent man. His enjoyments were all passive, and it was perhaps as well that his wife supplied energy and vivacity for both.

But for her gaiety, Rochester House would have been as solemn as Westminister Abbey. The apartments were grand and stately, with painted ceilings, carved wainscots, or hangings of gilt leather. Stately historical portraits adorned the walls; a crowd of servants waited in stately liveries. All remained as in the time of the late duke, a formal courtier of Frederick Prince of Wales.

While we were taking coffee, "the boys made their appearance, singly, and with a mutual salutation of "How are you, Medway?" "Algernon, how are you," that said little in favour of their habits of brotherly intercourse. Soon afterwards, and just as the Duke of Rochester's carriage had been announced, the doors were thrown open more formally than for the nephews of her Grace, and, under the name of "Mr. De Vere Fitzirnham," a tall handsome young man was ushered into the room. To *my* surprise, both the Duchess and my cousins looked surprised at the visit; but the enigma was solved by the Duke of Rochester leading the stranger to his wife, and presenting him in form, as "the son of my late friend, Mr. Fitzirnham, whose acquaintance I made yesterday at dinner at Jack Towns-

hend's.—The last time we met," added the Duke, pointedly, "was at his father's place in Kent, when my knee was the privileged post of my little godson."

"You have, I trust, engaged Mr. Fitzirnham to join our party to the Pantheon, to-night?" said the Duchess, with one of her most ingratiating smiles, and addressing the new comer rather than the Duke.

"His Grace was too considerate, Madam, to offer me an irresistible temptation," replied he, with an air of ceremony. "I am here for the graver purpose of accompanying the Duke of Rochester to the House. This is the night of the India Bill."

"And I fear I must already hasten you away," added the Duke, looking at his watch; on which they took leave and departed.

"A very fine young man," said the Duchess, as the door closed after the Duke and his *protégé*.

"Prodigiously fine, though not in point of ruffles," said Lord Medway with a sneer.

"I have often met Fitzirnham at Brookes's and Becket's," observed my cousin Algernon. "He seems popular. Erskine or Finch told me he was looking for political preferment, and was considered a rising young man."

"He belongs then to Brookes's?" inquired Lord Medway, in an altered tone.

"Oh, yes,—he belongs to every thing;—a nephew, you know, of the late Lord Halifax."

And this equivocal kinsmanship seemed to establish the stranger at once in the good opinion of my elder cousin.

CHAPTER V.

On this, and many following occasions, Lady Carleton was circumstantial in her inquiries as to all I had heard, seen, or imagined at Rochester House. Little, however, as I knew of the world, I felt it necessary to generalize in my replies. I admitted myself to have passed a pleasant day, concluding with a party to the Pantheon, where we had been escorted by my two cousins, and joined by a Lord and Lady Pembury, and Sir Claude Lovell. "Mr. Fitzirnham," I added, "preferred attending a debate in the House of Lords."

"Mr. Fitzirnham?—What Mr. Fitzirnham?

"A Mr. De Vere Fitzirnham, godson to the Duke, and son to one of his early friends."

"Aha!" cried Lady Carleton, with a significant smile, "I always guessed as much! She was an exquisitely beautiful woman."

I was too discreet to inquire the meaning of these allusions; particularly, as she spoke of the Duchess in terms equally mysterious; and, in course of time, as her Grace's kindness towards me increased, Lady Carleton's vindictive feelings became more and more apparent. Whenever my duchess aunt arranged some party to Ranelagh, or the theatre, in which she wished me to be included, my dowager aunt was sure to project some abominable tredrille, or tea-drinking at home; and, to prevent my accompanying the Duchess one night to Almack's, she tied up her head, on pretext of a toothache, and compelled me to pass the evening in soothing it with the polite literature of the "Town and Country Magazine," and the puling elegies of gentle Mr. Pratt. Even the sittings at Sherwin's soon failed me as a pretext for seeking the society of the Duchess of Rochester; long before little Moses could be surrounded by his nymphs and bulrushes, the Duchess of Rutland being compelled to quit her post for that of the Viceroyalty of Ireland.

Meantime, the letters I received from Spetchingley were

far from satisfactory. I found from Jane and Helen, who were permitted to correspond with me unrestricted, that they experienced all possible kindness and consideration from my step-mother; but that every thing had grown duller since my departure; that several of the old servants had been dismissed, and very little company visited at the house. The latter circumstance was easily accounted for, by the dissatisfaction of the neighbouring families at the successor chosen by Mr. Mordaunt to the loved and venerated Lady Betty; but Jane imparted various particulars calculated to excite my uneasiness. My father, she said, was miserably out of spirits, and would pass hours and hours without speaking; especially while his cousin Dick was away a week in town, for the arrangement of family business.

Dick Mordaunt in town!—I should have as soon expected to hear of Stonehenge finding its way to Hyde Park!—and for the arrangement of family business—when my father might just as well have relied upon the intervention of his shooting pony! I forgave the creature for having passed me over with such disregard, as not even to leave his name in Jermyn Street. But what *could* be the business which demanded his migration from Leicestershire, and reduced my jovial father to serious meditation? Careful not to excite the curiosity of my aunt, I addressed my inquiries on the subject to my eldest brother, the confidant of all my dilemmas.

"That there is a mystery I readily believe," was Henry's reply; "but my father has always shown reluctance in adverting to his affairs in my presence. Unless actuated by the jealousy of his successor, common to sovereigns and squires, I cannot conceive why he should withhold his confidence from a son who loves and respects him, to lavish it on a kinsman who, to do him justice, has scarcely wit enough for an earth-stopper. An observation that escaped my father in the altercation between us, on occasion of his second marriage, first led me to suspect that his affairs were embarrassed. He spoke of the gentility and wants of housewifery of ladies of quality, as gradually leading a respectable country family to ruin, in a tone of conscious bitterness, which I feared must bear reference to his own. Let not, however, my dear Lizzy concern herself too much on mere surmise. We know the style of living at Spetchingley; we know that the house has been

maintained on its own resources, and that neither parents nor children have indulged in blameable excess. Embarrassments, even if they exist, must be of a comparatively unimportant nature; and, unless aggravated by the superlative blunder-headedness of Dick Mordaunt, will scarcely bring the family estates to the hammer.

"My brother Alfred we may consider as provided for by Lord Rawborne. Miss Mordaunt, of whose conquests wonders are related at Oxford, is expected to make a brilliant match; and she is hereby requested to look out without delay for an heiress, (not, however, after the Rawborne fashion, at the synagogue) for her affectionate brother,

"H. M."

This letter served to rally my spirits: I began even to hope that my father's melancholy might proceed from the absence of his favourite "Lizzy;" and that Dick Mordaunt's expedition to London was an act of pure vagabondage. Perhaps he wanted to spy into the nakedness of the land, and ascertain into how moderate a compass of brick and mortar his proud cousin had been compelled to compress her pretensions.

From such surmises, it was agreeable to be summoned by the playful peremptoriness of the Dutchess.

"I am under orders from my Duke and master to proceed this moment to Chelsea," said she, one morning, snatching the fourth volume of "Sydney Biddulph" from my hand, and causing Lady Carleton to drop her quilting with surprise. "Bear me company, my dear Liz, and to reward you, come with me to-night to Ranelagh. You must not refuse me, sister," she continued, addressing Lady Carleton, "for I have pledged myself for Miss Mordaunt's presence to one whom it is little less than high treason to disappoint."

"I do not see how such a person can with propriety interest himself in Miss Mordaunt's comings and goings," said Lady Carleton, provoked to find her authority thus tacitly dispensed with; "but as your Grace and the young lady settle these things with so much ease between you, —I—"

"What a handsome quilt that will be when finished!" cried the Duchess, affecting to pick it up without giving ear to the remonstrances of the Viscountess—"I saw just such a one at Paris at Madame de Mirepoix's, who declared

it was worked for her when ambassadress in England, by the beautiful Lady Coventry,—Maria, you know,—the woman who died of white lead."*

And by this sort of *sang froid*, she always managed to defeat the manœuvres of Lady Carleton.

"What a happy woman should I be," she observed, when, after a pleasant drive along the King's Road, we reached a pair of huge, old-fashioned iron-gates, opening into a gloomy avenue of sycamores, "were I, like our venerable cousin of Portland, smitten with the love of antiquity!—All the earthly possessions of the De Veres seem encrusted with the mildew of age. The three last dukes of Rochester lived to be doting; so that their successors did not inherit till they were too old to improve—I mean to become improvers. You have already seen Rochester House; lift up your eyes and admire Beaufort Lodge,—once the residence of Sir Thomas More, and now the *maison de santé* of the tres-nobles demoiselles De Vere, whom you see crowded yonder under the old portal to receive us."

I lifted up my eyes, to admire—*not* Beaufort Lodge and its antiquities, but the youthful beauty of my little cousins. What a group! What a study for Sherwin!—Yet their mother patted each upon the head with scarcely more emotion than I had seen her infuse into the same caress bestowed upon Silverfleece, her lap-dog; and, while lady Isabella and lady Helena, the two eldest girls, strove to attract her attention by every little art in their power, the Duchess kept pointing out to me the painted windows and quaint carvings of the curious old mansion.

A venerable family-nurse, who, leaning on her stick, waited the arrival of the Duchess in the great gallery, converted into a school-room, seemed, by the reserved solemnity of her deportment, to resent this coolness on the part of the mother of her nurslings; whilst the French and German governesses pressed forward to gabble their compliments to her Grace, evidently with a view of eliciting some in return. But they were disappointed.

Don't you find these creatures shockingly awkward?" said my aunt, addressing me. "Helena, stand forward—lady Isabella, pray do not let your arms hang as if they

* The most beautiful woman of her time—perhaps of any time—did not require the aid of white lead—Envy.—Ed.

were broken. 'Tis very strange! They have had Lepicque all winter, and are more uncouth than when I left England."

"What can be expected at so early an age!"

"Every thing——

'Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd.'

and if Miss Holdfast, Mademoiselle Clairval, and Madame von Klattowski, cannot drill them into a better deportment, I vow I will send them to Paris, and settle them at Panthemont. I saw a little girl of Madame de Lauzun's not so old as Isabella, perform the minuet and gavotte, one night at Trianon, in a style that Vestris himself, who was present, admitted to be inimitable."

She started; for at that moment she perceived that while uttering all this heartless nonsense, the Duke of Rochester had entered the room. It was delightful to see the little creatures, who were hanging their heads behind the Duchess's chair, suddenly brighten up on their father's approach. He sat down, with hands extended towards them; and in a moment all five were clustered round his knees. From lady Helena it was "dearest papa, I have finished the landscape I promised you;"—from lady Isabella, "dear papa, I am embroidering you a waistcoat, for the birthday;" a third claimed the fine gold watch he had promised to bring her from Paris; the two youngest little creatures could exact or bestow nothing but kisses. He was their favourite—their friend—their father!

In return for these endearments, the Duke brought forward a case containing for each some little token of remembrance; a ring, a locket, an *étui*;—things of no great value, but calculated to procure childish delight to a child.

"You put me to the blush," observed the Duchess, literally blushing with mortification. "I suppose the habits of my education have blinded me to the necessity of initiating children into the pomps and vanities of life. I will shortly, young ladies, amend my neglect, and we shall see whether Mrs. Chenevix can supply us with baubles to rival those of the Petit Dunquerque."

The Duke of Rochester was a person to whom the world in general scarcely rendered justice. Society is an arbitrary tribunal. It chooses the wife of its popular poet to be a woman of genius; the wife of its favourite statesman

to be an Agrippina. It seemed of opinion, that the husband of its lovely Duchess ought to be an Adonis; and the Duke, though a distinguished-looking man, was neither young nor handsome. His hair, a sable silvered, grew every day whiter; his countenance, naturally grave, every day more serious. His broad commanding forehead, his reflective eye, the firm, though benignant, expression of his countenance, must have attracted, if limned by Vandyke, or Sir Joshua, the idlest lounger through a picture gallery to inquire the name of the original, certain of hearing in reply the announcement of some great legislator, some benefactor of his country. But such a face was misplaced at Ranelagh, and voted in the gay *salons* of the Mirepoixes and Boufflers, *ennuyeux comme la pluie*. It became the fashion to say that Lady John De Vere was ill-matched; that she had an old and disagreeable husband; yet, London and Paris united could not have produced his equal in excellence and intellectual endowments.

CHAPTER VI.

As we were returning from our visit to the little girls, whose adieus were damped by the supercilious tone assumed towards them by their mother, some anxiety expressed by the Duchess respecting the completion of a new hat, induced me to allude to our projected party to Ranelagh, as if it included the Prince of Wales.

"You have not yet got rid of your Philly Nettletop *naïveté*," she replied, laughing outright! "A less practised eye than your's might have seen that the Prince's name was thrown into the scale to decide poor old Carleton in our favour. He may be there; and if there (or bright eyes go for nothing,) will certainly join our party; but the illustrious personage to whom I alluded was no other than Lord Pembury, to whom I promised, in presence of his wife that Miss Mordaunt should bear me company, to-night, because said wife is too jealous to let him join me, with the possible prospect of a *tête-à-tête*. How I *do* hate a jealous wife! If the next philanthropic Captain Coram wanting to found a hospital, would but relieve us from such semi-lunatics, what a benefit to society! I own I cannot understand the malady. All Ranelagh might flirt with Rochester, and I should care no more than if he were dozing away his evening in the House of Lords.

It was needless to remind her how far this admission went to prove that no real attachment subsisted on *her* part towards her husband.

"And of all women to indulge in jealousy, Lady Pembury!" she exclaimed. "A woman who cares for nothing in this world of vanity, and cards, but the four kings. Had she taken it into her head to pull caps with me for Pam, I could have forgiven her; for last year, at Bath, I won three hundred guineas of the woman at old Lady Montagu's loo parties. But Lord Pembury, for whom she enter-

tains no higher value than *I* for the effigy of General Monk in Westminster Abbey! It is too absurd."

"Lady Pembury struck me as a beautiful woman," said I.

"Yes,—beautiful to those who prefer colour to form. She has a charming pink and white complexion; eyes like the Midsummer sky, and the old eternal story of coral lips and teeth of pearl. But one may buy just such waxen beauty in a toy-shop;—no expression,—no character,—no play of feature;—the monotonous innocence of a whole flock of sheep concentrated in a single face! How dares so inanimate a woman expect to preserve the affections of a man of taste and talent!"

"Certainly not by losing his money at loo," said I, laughing.

"Pembury would forget her existence," replied the Duchess, inadvertently, "unless she occasionally favoured him with reminders, in the form of cheques upon his banker."

"I no longer wonder that Lady Pembury is jealous," said I, as we turned from Oxford Road into the newly-paved streets leading towards the *rus in urbe* of the house of De Vere.

"In my opinion," retorted the Duchess, "husbands and wives should have attractions and merits to produce as title-deeds to their property, in addition to the special license by which they are originally transferred."

"A Parisian, rather than an English sentiment!" said I, adventurously. "Had it been uttered within hearing of my homely home, I should have expected to see the trees of the old avenue of Spetchingley start from their places."

"Less would probably suffice to unroot them," replied the Duchess, looking at her watch. "In England, the country is the ruin of the town; while, in France, the town keeps down the country. Paris has its factories for the improvement of ideas for the good of the kingdom, as well as for the improvement of calicoes or crockery-ware; *et bon train! en avant le siècle!* While *our* country gentlemen bring up to London their quizzical families and quizzical notions, to see the lions, and vote with Government; and every year the ground that we had gained falls in again upon our heads. But enough—here we are again at Rochester House—the head-quarters of dulness and old

fashiondom! I would as soon live in the great pyramid, *tête-à-tête* with the mummy of Cheops!"

Already I had learned to turn a deaf ear to half the flighty ramblings of the Duchess. My cousin Algernon assured me, she seldom knew half she said, or meant the other half.

"In London," said he, "the Duchess is a mere prating mask, who gabbles on to prevent her real character from being discovered. Get her at anchor, at Vere Court, in the quiet country, and, instead of the Thames so foul and turbid at Blackfriars Bridge, you will find the glassy Isis, pure, wholesome, and gliding through the green meadows."

The simile was graceful—I hoped to find it accurate.

Our party that night at Ranelagh was composed of a sufficient number of Sherwin's beauties and White's fine gentlemen, to excite considerable attention. Wherever we turned our steps, we were followed; the music *we* thought worth listening to, was vehemently applauded; and, when we sat down to supper, that gaping monster, the public, came to note how we swallowed our minced chicken, or quaffed our champagne. We had, however, no Prince of Wales. Other orgies were perhaps more attractive; and, as to Lady Pembury and her jealousies, she seemed to take as little note of the proceedings of the Duchess, as of mine.

She was escorted throughout the evening by Mr. Fitzirnham, whom I had now heard proclaimed, by twenty different voices, the most agreeable man about town.

"I can't make out that Fitzirnham, whom Algernon calls good company," observed Lord Medway, who was appointed my cavalier. "The fellow seems to have dropped from the clouds among us; and, like other things that drop from the clouds, what passes to-day for a thunderbolt, may prove to-morrow a piece of rusty iron."

"Mr. Fitzirnham may, in one respect, have fallen from the clouds," said I. "Lady Duncannon thinks him as handsome as an angel."

"Humph! he has a *faux air* of the Duke of Rochester—a sort of pinchbeck look of fashion. I fancy, however, your angel is rather by way of a man of letters than a man of quality! He sets up as heir presumptive or presumptuous to George Selwyn, who is superannuated.

They repeat this man's *bons-mots* at White's; Mrs. Vesey swears by his wit ——"

"And Lady Pembury smiles by it, which is better. A very pretty woman, Lady Pembury."

"Cannot admire her! Lady Pembury blazes in eternal sunshine—the set smile of beatitude and beauty. She is too ineffably self-contented. One sees that she has shone at Bath, at Spa, in Paris, in London; one sees in her—"

"Indeed, *I* see nothing in her but a beautiful woman."

"While she—or I am much mistaken—sees in *you* that hateful thing, a rival. Such glances as I have seen her directing and causing Fitzirnham to direct towards us! By the way, shall I see you to-morrow night at Rochester House?"

"I have no invitation for to-morrow night."

"It is no matter of invitation. You will be only one among five hundred."

"You surprise me. I have heard nothing of the party."

"Which does not surprise *me*. The Duchess could not invite you without Lady Carleton; and in a family so numerous as ours, to begin inviting one's relations is a rash measure; there is no knowing where the evil may end."

"But will it not be thought strange that the Duchess—"

"The very thing to determine her!—She likes to be thought strange, lest the world should find leisure to think her worse."

It was no easy matter to tranquillize the ire of the Viscountess when, on the following morning, the gossip of the St. James's Chronicle announced this assembly at Rochester House.

"It is not," she exclaimed, "that I have the slightest wish to be mixed up with the set of profligates whom the Duchess is pleased to assemble about her. But still, it wears a singular appearance to the public, for her own family to be excluded from her mob, and all London will be in arms."

"All London is otherwise employed," I ventured to observe. "The Clubs are busy in discussing the expected visit of the Duc de Chartres; and the fine ladies the dismissal of Perdita, upon whose chariot the basket of fine full-blown white roses, to simulate a countess's coronet, had so excited their indignation, that they have no leisure to notice our disappointment."

"I tell you it is *no* disappointment," said Lady Carleton, in a higher key. "My only reason for vexation at the Duchess's neglect is, that, branded as she already is with scandalous imputations—"

She paused. The loudness of her tone had prevented her hearing the announcement of a visitor; and the Duke of Rochester, with a card in his hand, already stood bowing at the door.

"I have to apologize for my intrusion," said he, struck by our air of confusion; "let my anxiety to be the bearer of a note from the Duchess, plead my excuse." Having placed the card in the hand of the Viscountess, I was enabled to admire the matchless skill of her grace in the lying logic of apology. "She trusted," she said, "than an invitation to a crowded assembly at Rochester House was needless to any member of the Rawborne family; but, lest the well-known politeness of Lady Carleton should prove punctilious, she had requested the Duke to be her representative in expressing, &c. &c."

I expected to see Lady Carleton return a dignified refusal to this tardy civility. But the invitation was so graciously accepted, that after the departure of the Duke, I could not help testifying my surprise.

"I had a strong motive for wishing to be at the party," replied Lady C. "The Prince, who of course will be there, is going to give a gala at Carlton House, after the political dinner of the gentlemen of the St. Alban's Committee; and, perhaps, on meeting us at my sister's, he may consider us worth inviting."

"But you have so long retired from the world, and avoided all public places!"

"I do not, like my sister Rochester and her clique, make my face a sign-post for Weltje's, the Pantheon, Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and other resorts equally notorious. But this ball at Carlton House may be considered the opening of a new era. It is worth walking from York to London, to see the Prince put on his hat in a minute. Lepicque says there never was any thing like him;—George Selwyn says there never was any thing like him;—Charles Fox says there never was any thing like him."

"And Mrs. Robinson—and Mrs. Crouch."

"Miss Mordaunt—let me recommend you to refrain from naming such persons in my presence."

"His Royal Highness, then, shall be all perfection; and let us humbly hope he will vouchsafe us an invitation to his ball. But, I warn you, my dear aunt, that the Duchess of Devonshire, with Lady Duncannon and Lady Melbourne, have made out the list; and our claim of kin to the Duchess of Rochester does not argue in our favour."

"I have a vast mind to drop my sister's party altogether," said Lady C., musingly, "and see what I can do through Devonshire House. Lord Carleton was one of the many friends of Mr. Hare; (Selwyn's Hare with many friends, you know;) supposing I tack about and try his interest?"

"But you forgot that you have pledged yourself to the Duchess of Rochester!"

"Very true. And when the ball at Carleton House is over and forgotten, we shall be sure to see at Rochester House this Duc de Chartres, of whom all the world is talking. At Paris, last winter, my sister was one of the idols of the Palais Royal—the only Englishwoman who succeeded equally well with the Court and the Orleans party; she played soubrettes in the theatricals at Trianon, and duets with Madame de Genlis. If Lord Medway were here, he would add 'and pharaoh with the Duchesse de Grammont, and the devil with her reputation!'"

That night the Duchess received us with great cordiality, at the door of the magnificent gallery of Rochester House, and it might be difficult to decide *which* sister exhibited the most consummate hypocrisy, and which was, in reality, least deceived in the exhibition.

"Think of my being obliged to have you, after all," whispered the Duchess to me, after having disposed of Lady Carleton among a synod of loo-playing dowagers. "The Duke insisted that every thing boasting, having boasted or likely to boast, the name of Rawborne, should be invited to my party, and forced me to put the best face on the matter. However, I console myself. His whim has enabled me to have *you*, which I should not have dared attempt, had not your dragon been duly appeased. By the way, I have been so civil to her, that she cannot refuse me your company to-morrow to dine at Weltje's. Fitzpatrick gives us a banquet; and Devonshire House and Rochester House—the courts of Elizabeth and Mary, are for once to be united. Lord Pembury took care to have your name on my card; and, what is more to the purpose, you

have a ticket for the affair at Carlton House, and we will go dressed alike, as Virgins of the Sun. The cits call it a character-ball; Burgoyne has named it the '*want* of character ball;'—meaning a masquerade without masks."

"What right have the cits to call it any thing?"

"Hush, hush!—the cits are becoming quite the fashion. I have two of the City members here to-night, and an alderman's wife and a half. The city is to do every thing for the Prince, as it does for all rebellious heirs apparent. It is to get his debts paid,—his improvements carried on. But I can't stay gossiping, now—I have fifty guineas on the pharaoh-table; and Lady Ailesbury won a septleva as I passed through the room."

Although a topic peculiarly unfitted to Rochester House and the Prince's presence, there were few other times and places where the embarrassments of the Prince were not just then discussed. From the day of obtaining his majority, he had laid the foundations of expensive buildings at Carlton House, and of debts of honour and * * * * innumerable. Every folly of the day grew to excess under his cultivation. He out-drove Sir John Lade—he out-diced Charles Fox. Ten thousand guineas were expended in a single year on his toilet; and between play-debts and debts of gallantry, the turf and the tailor's shop, it was hard to say in what quarter his Royal Highness's pecuniary engagements lay heaviest. But the nation, or (as the London part of the nation is called) the public, was satisfied! So long as he shared his hazard with Charles Fox, his claret with Sheridan, not a syllable was to be said. The sordid respectability of Kew, or the petty German-courtliness of Windsor, might be lampooned by Wolcot, reviled by Junius, and burned in effigy by Wilkes's mob—while the fine, gay, bold-faced * * * of Carlton House was a thing to be applauded in play-houses, and rewarded with prodigal grants by his Majesty's court of Parliament.

Well!—Heaven mend us!—The cardinal virtues of this virtuous kingdom of Great Britain have ever been a stiff-necked and perverse generation!—Time out of mind, our sovereigns expectant have waged war against our sovereigns regnant, with a ready faction at their heels; while the mob stands as patiently as a lord in waiting, with a mantle of purple and ermine, to throw over the raggedness of the prodigal son of majesty. The exemplary "best

of royal husbands and fathers," with his experimental farms, and Handel and Dr. Johnson, had not a huzza at command. The Prince, who threw away on the bouquets of his footmen thrice as much as the Berkshire farmer on his turnip fields,—whose anthems were opera airs, —whose Wyatt was Nuovolieschi,—whose West, Sherwin, —whose Johnson, Dick Sheridan;—the PRINCE was the universal idol!

CHAPTER VII.

THE gay busy town could just then busy itself with nothing but the Carleton House gala, given professedly to promote the union, and consequently to betray to the world the *dis*-union of parties. The stupid starers of London were grown almost as familiar with masquerades, as if accustomed to the annual enjoyment of "six weeks of varnished faces;—and Venice or Rome might have envied the dominoes of Ranelagh and the Opera-House. But a *bal costumé* was an innovation. A masquerade, where people were not afraid to show their faces, presented a new feature, as well as all the other features of St. James's, and St. Alban became the saint in vogue.

For myself, meanwhile, a thousand perplexities arose. In the first place, the difficulty of declaring to Lady Carleton that I had an invitation, and was to accompany the Duchess's party, which was to be costumed *à la Péruvienne*, the romance of Marmontel and the opera to which it gave rise, having brought Manco Capac into fashion.

"I almost wish we had chosen something simpler," said the Duchess, when describing to me the costume of a Virgin of the Sun; "or something in which my Bertin frippery could be useful to you. For, alas! my dear, I cannot offer to make you free of Peru. Jewels I can lend—brocades and embroidery give; but as to money,—thank the knaves,—I'm now not worth a ducat!—Versailles stripped me of my last louis for lansquenot. Brag, pharaoh, and loo, have completed my ruin: and as my husband, at his father's death, paid off thousands of debts for me—ay, and debts of thousands, on condition that the Duchess of Rochester should not renew the follies of Lady John De Vere, I have not courage to tell him that I am as much embarrassed as ever. This was the secret, by the way, of my empty-handed visit to Beaufort Lodge, which affronted the poor children."

I hastened to relieve her on my own account, professing myself sure of my Peruvian costume.

"But I fear you will be hectored by the Dowager; she will scarcely throw away so much money, without accompanying every guinea with a hard word."

"I would not be indebted to Lady Carleton, were her words as soft as eider," I replied, proudly. "But she has in her care some money, provided for my London follies by my father."

"So much the better. And since you *are* rich, be fine. Beat your guineas out into tinsel for this occasion, and they will turn to guineas again. I predict some important conquest."

Great was my consternation, therefore, on applying to Lady Carleton, to learn that the "whole sum had been expended for my benefit;" in other words, that she had approbriated it to her own use for my necessary expenses. My five guineas, too, had melted away.—I was absolutely pennyless!

"You have only to write to Spetchingley," was the cool remark of the Viscountess. "Your father could not expect fifty pounds to last for ever. Let Mr. Mordaunt know that an immediate remittance is indispensable."

To admit to her gossiping ladyship my suspicious relative to the state of affairs at home, was not to be thought of; but, to apply to my good father, with such misgivings in my mind, was equally impossible. I tacitly resolved, therefore, to give up the ball; and, as a preparatory measure, pleaded indisposition, and next evening declined accompanying my aunt to the Mall. But no sooner had she departed thither, than my cousin Algernon arrived, to find me musing over a scanty fire and the vexations of my position.

"I hoped you had heard enough of Lady Carleton's objections to your visits in Jermyn Street, during her absence," said I, with some degree of peevishness.

"Don't be angry—don't be uneasy; I am sure of her forgiveness. I come in the pacific character of a herald from my father, or rather like Danæ's Jupiter, I descend upon her ladyship's roof in a shower of gold; a shape so unquestionable, that I suspect she would welcome even Lord Carleton back to life, so he did but rain guineas into her attics. In short, (for, rhodomontade as I will, I must come to the awkward phrase at last,) my father long ago

deputed me to purchase for his beloved niece Betty, the daughter of Betty, some dress or trinket worthy her amiable acceptance. The hundred guineas entrusted to me for the purpose, weigh heavily on my pocket and my conscience; but I have no skill in 'black, white, and gray, and all their trumpery;' and if you do not mean, coz., to be made as ridiculous as the old Princess Amelia, you will purchase your own gewgaws with your own coin of the realm."

And while giving confused utterance to all this, he placed a splendid purse upon the chimney-piece.

I was startled. Algernon seemed to have dived by intuition into my difficulties; but my ready pride was on the alert.

"You would as easily persuade me," said I, "that Parliament had voted me a benevolence, as that Lord Rawborne was sufficiently himself to dream of making me a present!"

"You admit, at least, that, *if* from himself, such a gift would be natural and becoming; what, therefore, can be more proper than that Medway and myself, acting for him on all occasions, should fulfil the duties of his position?"

"Pardon me; this is no duty. A gift from Lord Rawborne to his niece might be the natural suggestion of his feelings; but a gift from a cousin to a cousin, in the *name* of the uncle, is a different thing; and, though you assume the interference of Lord Medway, I am convinced this trait of munificence arose wholly with yourself."

"You would accept it, then, more willingly from my brother?"

"Were I to say so, the inference would only be flattering to you. But, uncle, cousin, or cousins, acceptance is now impossible."

And taking the purse from the chimney-piece, I placed it in his hands; when, as Algernon again attempted to force it on my acceptance, the clasp flew open, and the five rouleaux fell into my lap."

"What is all this?" demanded the Viscountess, who, for the express purpose of espionage, had prematurely returned home. "I thought, Miss Mordaunt, I had very sufficiently explained the impropriety of your receiving visits from young gentlemen during my absence."

"You, perhaps, omitted to explain it to your servants, madam," I replied, greatly confused. "But you would scarcely wish me to be guilty of the discourtesy of turning a member of your family out of your house, when once admitted."

"And what is the meaning, pray, of this?" cried my aunt, pointing to the gold. "Am I to understand ——".

"Do not rack your brains, my dear good aunt, with surmises concerning the simplest transaction in the world," cried Algernon, gaining courage from my confusion. "My cousin, Harry Mordaunt, sent me yesterday from Oxford a credit on his banker for a hundred guineas, as a gift for his sister, which he wished her to receive with as little trouble as possible."

"Vastly considerate of my nephew—very kind of Harry!" ejaculated the old lady, enchanted to find the money present itself in a shape that warranted acceptance: "it could not arrive more opportunely; the poor child was sadly in want of a remittance."

During all this, I was on thorns. I had not courage to expose myself to the inferences of my aunt, by declaring the truth; yet by countenancing the statements of Algernon, I was involving myself in a maze of deceit. At the moment, I fancied nothing would be easier than to return the money to St. James's Square the earliest opportunity; but, scarcely had our visiter left us, when my aunt, in the interests of her strong box, took possession of the whole "for necessary expenses;" leaving me only the disposal of a few guineas.

I was now thoroughly perplexed,—thoroughly angry with my cousin for his misjudging kindness. The splendours of the costumed ball were, indeed, to be dearly purchased. I took, however, the only honest step that remained for me, by writing every detail of the transaction to my brother, Henry, requesting his advice and assistance; but prepared to receive assistance, *not* advice in return. Harry, I doubted not, would see the impropriety of my incurring a pecuniary obligation of such a nature. But, to my great surprise, his answer assured me that there was nothing more indelicate in the cadeau presented to me, than in the liberality practised, with the approval of my whole family, towards my brother Alfred. He ended by saying, that he had not thought me so *missish*, and begged that, instead of

flinging my next present at the head of the donor, I would lose no time in forwarding it to himself.

I was disappointed,—I was infinitely vexed. I took a dislike to Algernon, through whom this wound was inflicted on my pride. I began to detest the thoughts of the ball at Carlton House, which I doubted not, had suggested his impertinent generosity. I almost repented that I had not made my application to my second brother, Richard, rather than to my councillor, ordinary and extraordinary, Henry.

Whether some evil influence prevailed in the name of Richard Mordaunt, I will not determine; but the brother of that name was almost as little a favourite with me, as the cousin. Not from any resemblance between the two; for while Dick laughed the world and myself to scorn, Richard laughed not at all; and while Dick drank, raced, and hunted, Richard was cited as a model of sobriety and decorum.

At Eaton, instead of getting into scrapes like Alfred, or good company, like Harry, he got into an exhibition at Oxford, and had already distinguished himself; and Richard the demure, to the disgust of Dick the downright, was now actually studying for his degree. Had I applied to *him* concerning Algernon's benefaction, instead of sending me the means of repayment, he would probably have favoured me with a sermon!

"We will assemble to night in St. James's Square, on our way to Carlton House; the sight of our finery may serve to amuse my poor brother," was the arrangement of the Duchess for the memorable evening, the source to *me* of so many heart-burnings.

"Better not," was Algernon's rejoinder. "Lady Lavinia and her daughters dine with him."

"Then your house shall most certainly be our rendezvous," said the Duchess. "I choose those envious women to see how handsome Lizzy Mordaunt and Lizzy Mordaunt's aunt look in their Peruvian costume."

At my uncle's house, accordingly, we all assembled; and, having paraded our glittering splendours before his vacant stare and the sneers of the Shanstone tribe, it remained only to marshal the group as we were to make our appearance in the ball-room. The Duke of Rochester being of the dinner party at Carlton House, the Duchess

was to be led by Lord Pembury, and Lady Pembury by Lord Medway.

"And whom will you have, child, for your Cazique?" inquired her grace, whose spirits were too high for much regard to propriety. There is Mr. Fitzirnham, and here is your cousin, Algernon, waiting the honour of your election."

"Mr. Rawborne is nearest of Miss Mordaunt's height," suggested Lady Pembury.

"And Fitzirnham the more experienced cavalier," observed her lord. "Fitzirnham knows the exits and entrances of Carlton House as well as the page in waiting."

"Choose, child;—we are all waiting!" cried the Duchess.

I replied by curtseying to Mr. Fitzirnham, resolved not to bestow the smallest token of courtesy on my offending cousin.

"Ah! poor Algernon!"—cried Lord Medway, laughing, as he rang for the carriages. "You see how it is! A husband or a cousin is sure to be laid aside for the sake of novelty."

"You have caused a weighty duty to devolve on me," said Mr. F. as he led me down stairs. "I must take care that Miss Mordaunt shall not repent the signal honour with which she has distinguished me."

"Pardon me for not allowing it to pass for a distinction," said I. "I wished to leave my cousin at the disposal of the Duchess, who is accustomed to have him call carriages, and take care of cloaks and hoods, at her bidding."

A compliment, however, my new friend seemed determined to esteem it. He never quitted my side; he spoke to no other person; devoting his time to announce by name, and explain by nature, the eminent individuals of whom that brilliant society was composed. I could scarcely have had a better cicerone. Mr. Fitzirnham was personally acquainted with all the political notorieties of the day; and, with regard to other notorieties, it was singular with what tact he managed to avoid every anecdote savouring of vulgar scandal, while pointing out, by characteristic traits, the most original of that world of originals.

Till Mr. Fitzirnham offered himself as my cicerone, no one had been at the pains of favouring me with a *catalogue raisonné* of the Blue and Buff parties and their auxiliaries;

and, at that period, Fox, Burke, Fitzpatrick, Sheridan, or Townshend, were to me persons of minor interest compared with the Devonshires, Duncannons, Melbournes, Crewes, St. Johns, Cravens, Jerseys, Bunburys, with whom their names were associated in the gossip of society; "Fox's Martyrs," as they were called, stood secondary to his angels.

Among the fairest present, by the way, was one, neither an angel nor a martyr of the Foxites; the young and lovely bride of Lord Beauchamp, who, with her charming sisters, the daughters of Lord Irwin, and her relatives the pretty Talbots, arrayed as a group of Spanish Donnas, were the successful rivals of our Peruvian party. Little did I expect that, forty years afterwards, I should behold her in that very palace, swaying as Marchioness of Hertford, and a grandmother: the capricious fancy of royalty which her early loveliness had failed to enthral!

"May I presume to inquire what you think of us?" inquired Mr. Fitzirnham, after watching my silent contemplation of the scene before me. "Are we not very brilliant?"

"Very brilliant,—very *glittering*," said I, with an emphasis on the latter word; (for the taste for foil, French paste, and false stones were then disgustingly prevalent.) "Glittering as a winter's night, whose stars shine in proportion to its coldness!"

"How?" said my companion, turning towards me with amazement, "an epigram from lips which, like those in the story, ought to drop only pearls and diamonds?"

"And what is an Epigram but a diamond?" I replied. "Brilliant, compact, and capable of cutting even the hardest substances."

"I am beginning to be afraid of you!" cried Fitzirnham. "You were given in charge to me, as a lamb, requiring the wind to be tempered, in pity to its tenderness; and I find, on the contrary, the sagacity and courage of the shepherd's dog."

"Instead of a kitten, in short, a tigress! Mr. Rawborne ought to have prepared you for the failings of his cousin."

"I should not have believed him. But we are playing tapestry here among the dowages, with a cotillion yonder not yet made up. May I hope for the honour of your hand?"

And for the first time, we danced together.

"You did not accompany the Duchess of Rochester to the supper at Mrs. St Johns, on Saturday after the Opera?" said my partner, continuing the conversation.

"Perhaps you are not aware," I replied, "that I am not the inmate of the Duchess? My aunt is kind enough to take me to balls and places of amusement where I am likely to be entertained. But cards and politics afford me little diversion; at these suppers, I find little else."

"Nothing pleasant or profitable, I admit," replied Fitzirnham, with a sigh. "But are you indeed that *rara avis*, the woman who, of all London, avows her contempt for politics,—politics, which the divinities with whom we are *pas de basque*-ing, esteem the one thing needful?"

"I was plainly brought up," said I.—"Like most country squires' daughters, my occupations have been confined to reading Tillotson, and hemming dusters. In *our* house, politics, like liveries, were considered a family inheritance; my father's tailor mechanically fitted his footman with purple and silver, and my father's daughters curtseyed mechanically to the toast of 'Church and King.' The Mordaunts, in short, are Pittites. Under such auspices, do me the kindness to hope that I am no politician."

"But you will surely lend your aid to the Duchess, who has condescended to promise that she will canvass for our friend Charles Fox at the approaching election?"

"I accompany my aunt whenever she commands it. Fortunately, she does not consider me old or wise enough to be consulted; or, I might be tempted to tell her how unsuitable to her sex and rank I hold such an occupation as electioneering."

"I am glad you have the grace to yield the precedence to '*sex*,'" observed Fitzirnham, with a mortified air; "for my part, I think nothing unsuitable to a woman that tends to approximate her interests in life to those of her husband; and many a statesman's wife would be better employed in copying his notes, and studying the authors whence *his* knowledge has been derived, than in squandering her time and money at brag and pharaoh."

"Are there no other alternatives?" said I. "I never read in story that the wife or mother of Coriolanus aided him by cajolements to obtain the most sweet voices of the citizens, or procured bands of hirelings to fling up their caps in his honour."

"Perhaps not; but you *have* read that they betrayed him into abandoning the cause to which he had pledged himself," replied Fitzirnham; "perhaps because they had been taught to curtsey to the toast of church and state, and to limit their occupation to hemming dusters. But how came you to find all this logic in Tillotson?" cried he, suddenly changing his tone; "and above all, how came Aza and Zilia to be talking sense, when they ought to be eating ices?"

The foundations of acquaintanceship were thus laid between us. I rejoined the duchess, who, feeling perhaps that she had sufficiently exhibited herself as the companion of Lord Pembury, made the tour of the rooms, leaning on my arm. She was always pleased that we should be seen together. The family resemblance between us was universally acknowledged; and she seemed proud of hearing it said "Is not Miss Mordaunt the image of the Duchess of Rochester, as she was a few years ago?" Had they said twelve or ten, they would have been too near the truth to have pleased her; but it was satisfactory to learn that she had been as young at five and twenty, as Betty Mordaunt at eighteen.

Meanwhile, few things amused me more than the ingenuous questions touching the town and its pleasures, contained in the letters of my sister Jane, whom such serious matters as balls and beaux were beginning to interest. She did not, indeed, inquire, like the country cousin of Mrs. Greville, "whether muffs and ponies were worn so *very* small;" but was curious to ascertain whether I did not feel ill at ease amid the formalities of the great world. Poor dear Jane!—little did she imagine that the "great world" I lived in was a world of Toms, Dicks, and Harries; or that the "honoured sir" and "honoured madam," exacted by the filial duty of the county of Leicester, were in the parish of St. James restricted to the correspondence of footmen and chambermaids.

Etiquette was, in fact, pushed from its stool; and already the consequences of this dethronement were disagreeably apparent. Their armour thrown aside, the dismantled knights appeared in cuerpo; while the flowing robes replacing the farthingale of prudery, were somewhat loosely fastened on. In the society of the duchess, I heard and saw much to which I would willingly have remained blind

and deaf. But every day I began to find myself clearer-sighted; and, during my four months in town, a year's experience had enlightened my rustic simplicity.

Before I quitted the gala at Carlton House, I had been surprised that Algernon, overcoming his ill-humour, should condescend to invite me to join the dancers.

"Come with me into the gallery," said he, drawing me away from the play-room, where my chaperon had stationed herself the greater part of the night; "I don't want you to dance with me,—I don't want you to smile upon me,—I will give you leave to be as disdainful as you please. All I ask is, a promise that you will not accept the Duchess's invitation to drive out to-morrow."

"And why not? A turn in the Parks in my aunt's phæton will refresh me after these hot rooms."

"You will refresh yourself more by a day of rest."

"But on what plea could I refuse, or where could I go to avoid her?"

"I heard Lady Lavinia Shanstone reproach you the other day with undutiful neglect of her invitations."

"Those girls are so formal,—so tiresome!"

"Clara, on the contrary, is a charming creature, if you will be at the trouble of making her acquaintance."

"You have profited, then, my dear coz., by Lord Medway's advice?"

"Medway's advice?"

"That you would not suffer both the tall heiresses to go out of the family for want of courage to attempt a steeple-chase."

"You are wonderfully witty to-night. In my opinion, Clara is not an inch too tall; yet I do not aspire so high. But this is no answer to my request. Will you oblige me?"

"Certainly not, without receiving rhyme or reason in exchange for my complaisance."

"I leave it to Fitzirnham and his friend Dick Sheridan, to gratify you with rhyme. For reason, I have only to give, that neither your father nor brothers would approve of your being second to the Duchess in her Quixotic expedition."

"After all, then, your mysterious preamble relates to a little harmless electioneering! Make yourself easy. I have not only pledged my word to Mr. Fitzirnham to use

my utmost efforts in support of the Duke of Rochester's friend, but my aunt is to be supported in her canvass by all the most distinguished women in town—the Duchess of Devonshire, Mrs. Crewe——"

"Enough, enough! I might have guessed that I was too late. That you have pledged your word is sufficient," cried Algernon, with bitterness. "Let us rejoin the Duchess."

CHAPTER VIII.

ALGERNON, as I had found him before and often found him afterwards, was right in his conclusion. It was not, however, till three weeks after the opening of the Westminster Election that I received from my brother Henry the following epistle:

"The fashionable intelligence of the newspapers informs me, that among the beauties gracing the hustings in Covent-garden, and winning innumerable partisans by her smiles, is 'the lovely and accomplished Miss Mordaunt.' That this smiling lady may not prove my very dear sister Lizzy, I earnestly hope. I cannot reconcile it to myself that one so delicately punctilious about receiving a trifling present from her mother's brother, should have lent her face as a lure to the worship of the mob, and her ears to the profanation of its grossness: in support, too, of a cause to which all of her name and race are distinctly opposed. Write to me, my dear girl, and relieve my mind from so vexatious an apprehension."

But so to write, alas! was out of the question. It was Betty, the daughter of Betty,—the daughter of that mild and modest housewife,—who had been courting coarse retorts from butchers and tallow-chandlers, by her flippant solicitation of their support, for a senator to legislate in their name and that of the greatest nation upon earth! It *was* my silly self, who had been talking till I was hoarse on subjects wholly above my comprehension;—it *was* the proud Miss Mordaunt, of Spetchingley, who had condescended to have her hand pressed, and her waist encircled, for the honour of securing a vote for the friend of the Prince, the candidate upheld between the rival smiles of Devonshire and Rochester houses!

But what vilenesses become sanctified by custom!—what follies rendered classical by the ennobling badge of fashion!—Every day, during the six weeks' continuance of the election, I saw the dignified Duke of Rochester, the

amiable Mrs. Crewe, with fifty others of equal unimpeachability, launched into the vortex of noise and vulgarity; the wisest and best giving way to the enthusiasm of the hour, and playing fantastic tricks before high Heaven and the high bailiff. An election, at all times so exciting, so intoxicating a crisis, was, in this instance, dignified by the presence of talent—beauty—rank; even the Prince, in defiance of taste and propriety, affected to make the cause his own. Our mornings were occupied in animating the eloquence of Fox and his advocates, and parading ourselves before the gaze of the people, every day. We dined, almost in public, with the same parties,—sometimes at Weltjie's, where the evening concluded in high spirits with high play. We wore the colours of the party, the "Fox medal" round our necks, the "Fox laurel" round our brows; never was candidate supported by such zeal and fervour of partisanship!

And all because it was the fashion! The amiability of Charles Fox's manners, and his devotion to the sex, secured him, far more than the liberalism of his opinions or brilliancy of his wit, the support of those not already subdued by the favouritism of Carlton House and the enthusiasm of duchesses. The Prince of Wales displayed the Fox favours on his equipages; the prettiest pony-phætons frequenting the parks were decorated with the same colours; and (alas! for the dignity of a reputation destined to agitate the snows of Muscovy, and thrill through every nerve of the Convention,) Charles James Fox was *the fashion!*

While the election proceeded, I took no heed of time; but, when at last we became sobered by what usually produces intoxication—success,—I found that six weeks had elapsed; and that summer, with its flowers and verdure, had made its appearance.

It was strange that not even Lady Carleton, usually so prompt in disturbing the even current of other people's satisfaction, had interfered to molest me. The Duchess having propitiated her, in the first instance, by enlisting her in our service, to canvass the loo-playing spinsters of Abingdon-street; the public prints secured her neutrality in the second, by hinting in divers paragraphs, that, "at the close of the election, one of the fairest supporters of the popular candidate, the beautiful Miss M., of Spetchingley, would be united to one of the most influential ad-

herents of the Blue and Buff party, Sir Claude Lovell, of Lovell Park."

These rumours satisfied my aunt, far more than the bulletin of the state of the poll, that all was going on right at the hustings; and, though I assured her, on my nightly return to Jermyn Street, that the gossip-mongers were at fault, she attributed my denials to the remains of my rustic bashfulness, and satisfied that I was about to become the rich and fashionable Lady Lovell, joined more eagerly than ever in the cry of "Fox for ever!"

Lady Carlton seemed to have forgotten the very name of De Vere Fitzirnham; and, strange to tell, not one of the busy meddlers of our acquaintance was at the trouble of informing her that it was by *him*, and not by Sir Claude Lovell, Miss Mordaunt was escorted through the throng; that *he* was my partner at the public ball given in honour of our triumph, at the Prince's saloon at the Opera, and the private one at Devonshire House. Sir Claude Lovell, it is true, was always sauntering in Rotten-row, to hand me from the carriage when we found leisure for a stroll in Kensington Gardens; and dined frequently at Weltjie's, when the Duchess was persuaded into the frolic of a club dinner. But he was a party man only in one sense of the word. After dinner, Sir Claude, sank below the horizon, no one knew whither. Some said that claret was his Lethe, and that he vanished from sight no further than under the table. But this (never having sought him) I could not affirm. I only knew that, while he was said by the newspapers and the world to be paying me his addresses, I was not once disturbed in my growing intimacy with Mr. Fitzirnham by his appearance in any evening circle.

"So you have actually robbed the wax-doll of its lover?" said the Duchess one night, as she was conveying me home to Lady Carleton's. "I saw something as nearly approaching to vindictiveness on its features this morning, at Epsom, as so insipid a face was capable of expressing."

"If, by the wax-doll, your Grace mean Lady Pembury," said I, "her angry looks were probably directed rather towards her lord's devotion to others of the party, than towards the common civilities of Mr. Fitzirnham to a person so insignificant as mysself."

"If, by others of the party, your Missishness means my Grace," said the Duchess, laughing at my heroics, "I

should think I had sufficiently accustomed her to the spectacle of Lord Pembury's attentions, to have taken off the edge of her jealousy. But some women are incorrigible!"

"Incorrigible, indeed."

"*D'autant plus*, that to the folly of jealousy, Lady Pem. adds the crime of ingratitude. Did I not, with my own voice and curtsey, introduce her this very morning to the Duc de Chartres; and, while his serene Highness's *quatre valets—Cœur, Carreau, Trêfle, et Pique*, (y'clept by mortals the Dukes of Devon, Dorset, Bedford, and Queensbury,) tried to drag him off to the stand, did I not detain him five minutes opposite to her barouche, by an eloquent discourse in honour of her bugle eye-balls and her cheeks of cream?—I swear 'tis the last word I will ever utter in the woman's favour!"

"Did you observe how very high Lady Pembury was betting?—Sir Claude Lovell won fifty guineas of her on the Derby; and I heard my cousin Medway accuse her of having lost five hundred to the Prince."

"Did he? The very surmise of such a loss on the part of a woman, will be enough to keep Medway from marrying for a year to come! Had Algernon any thing on the race?"

"I do not know. He seldom comes near me, now. I am told he is paying attention to one of the nieces of Lady Clifford."

"One of the Beaulieu girls?—He cannot be such an idiot! The Beaulieus, like that Fitzirnham of yours, are beggars: and Algernon Rawborne, like yourself, has his fortune to make by marriage. He must put up with one of his Shanstone cousins, just as *you* must must make the best of Sir Claude Lovell."

"I, Madam!"

"Yourself, child!—And, by the way, I have good news for you on that head. The Prince, my dear Liz, wishes you well; he thinks you handsome, unassuming, amiable, and so forth; and was enchanted by your zeal during Charlie's election."

"His Royal Highness does me much honour," said I, far more gratified than such scanty praise seemed to deserve.

"He has your match with Sir Claude at heart. And, as Carlton House is the only place where Lovell deigns to show himself of an evening, has given me permission to

bring you to his next supper party. This, you are to know, is by especial favour. I have never seen an unmarried woman there, except at the balls and assemblies."

"In that case, perhaps, it might be as well that I did not appear there?" said I. "Carlton House is beginning to attain a very equivocal reputation; and as people at a distance cannot distinguish between its changes of morals and manners for this night, or the next, perhaps——"

"Perhaps you are a little fool," cried the Duchess, patting me on the cheek with her fan; "people at a distance, as well as people near, will soon find you have a champion for your good name, in the doughty Sir Claude."

"And even were it so," I interrupted, "what do I gain by endangering it in the interim? Mr. Fitzirnham assures me that——"

"Mr. Fitzirnham,—Mr. Fitzirnham," cried the Duchess, now really angry. "Pray do not give me reason to suppose that young gentleman capable of intruding his officious advice into my family, in contradiction to my own; or the forbearance with which I have excused his presence, may come to an abrupt conclusion. I rely upon you, Miss Mordaunt, to make your friend understand this. He has, perhaps, counted too largely on my toleration."

Fortunately, we were at the door of Lady Carleton, or I might have been provoked to an unbecoming and imprudent retort. Once alone with my elder aunt, my thoughts were soon diverted by her accustomed multiplicity of queries. There was always some one thing she particularly wanted to know; her anxiety concerning which she tried to disguise, by confusing it among ten thousand objects of interrogation. On this occasion, she was in the best of humours; having been pottering away the evening with small quadrille and small negus, in some *coterie* of dowager twaddles, where she was overwhelmed with congratulations on the brilliant success and approaching marriage of her niece.

"Pray my dear child," said she, as she bade me farewell for the night, "do not forget, that though others may have aided to forward this happy change in your prospects, but for *me* you would still have been droning away your days at Spetchingley."

"I trust, madam, I shall never give you cause to think me ungrateful for so much kindness," said I, interrupting, by my vague reply, a thousand unpleasant explanations;

for I was eager to find myself alone in my once detested attic; eager to dismiss the attendance of the loquacious Mrs. Phillis; eager to commune with my own heart and in my chamber, but not, alas! be still; for this long neglected ceremony of self-communion rendered me infinitely restless.

Lo! I had now attained the climax of my Spetchingley ambitions. I had thrown off the authority of the woman I despised, the familiarities of the man I disliked,—I had visited London,—had reached the highest point of fashionable notoriety. My portait, after Sherwin's sketch, was hanging in the print shops,—my name inscribed in the registers of courtly newspapers. I belonged to the supreme of supremacy, the *coterie* of Carlton House; was the associate of highnesses, royal and serene—of fascinating Duchesses and fascinated politicians. Nay, even the distinguished suitors to my beauty, of whom my vanity had luxuriated in far off visions, were beginning to throng to my feet. In addition to the courtship of Sir Claude, Lord M., the only son of the Earl of C., had made me an offer of his hand, which I had not dared avow to either of my aunts. I had, in truth, attained the climax of my Spetchingley ambitions!

Yet, I was miserable!—yes, *miserable*, according to the most approved form of Miss-in-her-teenish desperation; nay, perhaps, of a still higher order of misery, I was in love with a man of noble character, and eminent abilities,—and without hope of return. The Foxes and Fitzpatricks, the Greys and Townshends, were to *me* no more than their painted effigies from the pencil of Sir Joshua; for these heroes belonged notoriously to a class to whom their neighbours' wives are more an object of coveting than their neighbours' daughters. But though I had been assured by more than one Mrs. Candour, of the Rochester House School for Scandal, that Mr. Fitzirnham was no otherwise to be distinguished from his gay associates than by a handsomer person and less reckless demeanour, I had from our first acquaintance discerned in him a thousand superior qualities, inducing the hope that his principles were regulated by a higher standard. I was satisfied that he was not in love with Lady Pembury; but without the slightest reason to flatter myself he was the lover of Miss Mordaunt.

Jealousy is said to be a quick-sighted passion; and my

jealous cousin Algernon was evidently as confident of Fitzirnham's attachment to *me*, as of mine to him. But Algernon, in this case, saw double. My affection was returned only with admiration. Fitzirnham paid many a tribute to my beauty, many to my sprightliness; but the tenderness which beauty and wit fail to call forth,—that tenderness, the sacred prize of humbler but better gifts,—neither trembled in his voice, nor melted in his glances. While Algernon's colour went and came, according to the sport of my caprice—while Algernon would assert, deny, revoke, with charming inconsistency, according to the dictation of my whims, Fitzirnham remained uncompromised. My frowns might make him laugh; my vivacity, weary; but never for a single instant had I moved him from his self-possession. Was not this a check to the presumption of the rising belle—a blow to the arrogance of Miss Mordaunt of Spetchingley?

It was idle for me to say, in my self-conceit, "It shall be otherwise—I will subdue the man at last." All the arts at my disposal had been attempted, and in vain. I owned it to myself without disguise or shame, that I had laboured my utmost to fix his attention; for Fitzirnham's position in the world was so far from solid, that my pride felt secure from the accusation of interested motives. Having refused Sir Robert Warley and Lord M———, and frowned upon Sir Claude Lovell, I felt privileged to smile upon the younger brother of a country gentleman. I had perhaps even exceeded the bounds of prudence in my encouragement; for my desire to find myself in De Vere Fitzirnham's society, which had induced me to neglect the prohibition of my brother, was now about to render me a guest at the far-famed suppers of Carlton House.

CHAPTER IX.

The fêtes just then projected in honour of the first visit of the Duc De Chartres to the Prince of Wales, were brilliant as became the hospitality offered by a royal host to a royal guest; and a thousand flattering voices were raised on all sides to welcome a prince, destined in after years to be reviled as a disgrace to human nature. For historical characters, like drawings in sympathetic ink, assume their colouring according to the degree of heat to which they are exposed. As regent and king, even the prince was fated to fall from the angelic eminence he had enjoyed as heir apparent; while the Duc de Chartres, on presuming to profess under the name of "Egalité Orleans" a practical interpretation of the divine precept, that "All men are brethren," was fated not only to forfeit caste, but to lose his popularity—and his head!—

> Knew him, I did, and in the happier hour
> Of social freedom, ill-exchanged for power;

applauded by the noble jockeys of Newmarket for his pertinacity in confronting the displeasure of the French Court, in order to witness the dicision of his bets at the Spring meeting; and lauded to the skies by the coterie of Carlton-House, for his generous offer of relieving the Prince from his pecuniary embarrassments. Hitherto, indeed, Madame de Genlis had succeeded only in creating discord in the *ménage* of a prince married according to his degree, rather than his inclinations;—she had not yet involved him in revolutionary cabals. The world of White's saw in him only a showy, brilliant, licentious man of quality, in whose ideas were jumbled Wilkes and Liberty,—

Newmarket and Eclipse,—Carlton-House, and Charlie Fox,—jockey-boots and hunting-saddles,—all and equally as parts of the Anglo-mania just then in vogue among the fashionables of France; a vain, idle, dissipated man, as little of a conspirator as Colonel O'Kelly, or the Duke de Lauzun,—as Lord Barrymore, or the Duke of Queensbury.

It was fortunate for me that my inauguration into the coterie of the prince occurred at a moment of such splendour; in addition to the parties at Carlton House, we had constant assemblies at the Duchesses of Rochester's and Devonshire's,—parties to Ranelagh, the Pantheon, Vauxhall,—or boating-parties to Richmond or Hampton Court. Lord Pembury, Fitzirnham, and my two cousins, usually escorted us—the Duke of Rochester being engrossed by his duties in the House of Lords, and frequent visits to his invalid brother, Lord Hugh de Vere, who resided at a family seat, called Penderells, on the borders of Hertfordshire.

From these visits, I observed that he returned not only depressed in spirits, but less disposed than usual to indulgence towards the follies of his giddy wife. Lord Hugh de Vere was a man of grave and conscientious frame of mind, rendered still graver by illness, still sterner by seclusion, and painfully susceptible on the score of family honour. I suspect that the mild benignity of the Duke was occasionally disturbed by the remonstrances of the valetudinarian against his culpable acquiescence in the levities of the Duchesss of Rochester.

It happened that as an accomplished musician, and devoted to the classical school of the art, the Duke was selected as a director of the concerts about to be performed in Westminster Abbey, in commemoration of Handel;—an undertaking for which he condescended to solicit the patronage of his wife. But Handel being an object of favour at Windsor Castle, Carlton House had, of course, declared itself in favour of the Italian school; and as loudly as the King and Queen applauded the oratorio of the 'Messiah,' did the Prince of Wales applaud the opera of 'La Molinara."

"I am come to entreat that you will oblige me by attending the sacred concerts about to be given for the benefit of the Musical Fund," said the Duke, entering a morning room overlooking the old-fashioned Dutch garden of

Rochester House, in which my aunt was accustomed to receive her privileged friends.

"Devote five days to psalm-singing?" cried she, looking for support to Lord Pembury, Colonel St. Leger, and Fitzirnham, who were her guests. "What have I done to deserve such a penance? Your Abramses and Knyvetts are my utter detestation.

"I have, therefore, much pleasure in promising you Mara and Pachierotti," replied the Duke, "who have been engaged at my suggestion."

"Poor dear Mara!—an encore in the 'Horse and his Rider' would be the ruin of her splendid voice," observed the Duchess, turning to St. Leger.

"She has undertaken only 'Pious Orgies,'—the song so charmingly given by our friend Mrs. Sheridan. I am sure you will feel pleasure in hearing her," mildly interposed the Duke.

"Not at the risk of a rheumatic fever from the chill and damp of the Abbey," said the Duchess coldly.

"Which nothing, of course, but a coronation would tempt your Grace to overlook," observed Fitzirnham in a bantering tone.

"In *that* case, proper precautions are taken."

"Not more than in the present," said the Duke. "I promise you a seat secure from chill or damp."

"Exposed rather to the perils of suffocation," observed Colonel St. Leger in a low voice. "You will be entitled to the honours of the directors' box, next to that of the Royal Family."

"To be a public mark for the ungraciousness of the King and Queen!" cried the Duchess. "Delightful!"—

"Their majesties are too much interested in the success of the Commemoration, to render it an occasion for testifying their political resentments," said the Duke with firmness.

"One of the objects, then, of my appearance in the Abbey, is to curry favour with Windsor Castle?—In that case, I am doubly pledged to the Prince to absent myself," retorted the lady haughtily.

"By this inference you have placed me under the necessity," said the Duke, "of *exacting* your attendance. Do what you please about supporting the Fund, of which I am patron; but *one* morning, at least, of the Festival, the Duchess of Rochester must appear with me at the Abbey."

As he slowly withdrew, the Duchess gazed after him with an air of undisguised contempt.

"Tell it not in Gath," said Colonel St. Leger, rising to take leave, "that the Duchess of Rochester is about to appear in the ranks of the Philistines!"

"Tell it not at Devonshire House, where you are probably going," cried the Duchess, "or you will hereafter stand convicted as a false prophet. Silence does not always give consent; and, in spite of Lizzy Mordaunt's imploring looks, who I know is dying to go to the Commemoration, no Handel for *me!*"

"Better not provoke him," observed Lord Pembury, approaching her work-table, and addressing her in a low voice, after St. Leger and Fitzirnham had bowed and taken leave—"Better not irritate him for such a trifle."

"It is no trifle," replied the Duchess in the same confidential tone. "I look upon it as a trial of strength. Besides I consider these five days to be safe and our own."

I heard not Lord Pembury's rejoinder. The words "safe and our own," startled me so completely, that I rose and descended a flight of marble steps, leading from the room in which we were sitting into the garden, where vases and statues stood thicker than the clipt yew-trees forming the verdure of the old-fashioned place.

"Safe and our own!"—Already my attention had been directed by the malicious comments of Lady Carleton towards the intimacy between the Duchess and Lord Pembury; and though my Spetchingley experience afforded no grounds for inferring the possible extent of the mischief, I had heard enough since my arrival in town to know that there was evil, disgrace, and shame to be apprehended. My cheeks flushed crimson at the idea that things might have been passing in my presence equally objectionable with the expression which had shocked me, observable to others but hitherto unnoticed by myself. What suspicions might I not have incurred! Might not Fitzirnham himself suppose me cognizant of indiscretions which had never even excited my conjectures?—

I trembled, more with indignation than fear; and such was the feeling by which I was actuated, when, on re-entering the book-room a quarter of an hour afterwards, and, finding her alone, I walked straight up to my aunt, acquainted her with my surmises, and earnestly implored her to

prove them groundless, by acceding to the request of the Duke of Rochester.

For some moments she was silent from surprise. "If it were not clear to me that you are set on by the impertinent interference of others," said she, throwing aside her netting, and leaning back on the sofa, "I should think it necessary to express my opinion of the indelicacy of your conduct. As it is, I must be permitted to laugh at you, my poor Lizzy, as the catspaw of a grimalkin, slyer than all her tribe. But look you, child, I may not always be in so indulgent a mood; therefore let me beg"—

"Be assured," said I, venturing to interrupt her reprimand, "that I am prompted on this occasion solely by my own observations."

"In that case," she replied, ringing and ordering the carriage, "do me the favour to return to Jermyn Street. I will have no spies under my roof. Make what explanations you please to Lady Carleton; but, for the future, if we meet less, we may esteem each other more."

My pride was now in arms. Though vexed to have offended the Duchess, I felt myself completely in the right, and was persuaded that, in the course of a day of two, her generous nature would suggest that herself only was in fault. Many days ensued, however, without token of forgiveness. No visit—no note from the duchess, with whom for six previous weeks I had scarcely passed six hours without communication. Lady Carleton grew inquisitive, and insisted on knowing what misunderstanding had occurred between us. She began to fear that Sir Claude Lovell had withdrawn his suit; while Algernon not only resumed his visits, but a new offender appeared in the shape of a certain Mr. De Vere Fitzirnham,—one of the ragged regiment of younger brothers, the abhorrence of all prudent aunts and speculating waiting-women!

Already Mrs. Phillis had received and issued orders of exclusion against the intruder. But his card once deposited upon my table, I was satisfied that he had noticed my absence from my accustomed haunts, and considered me worthy of remembrance.

Fifty Sir Claude Lovells might have made their way to Jermyn Street, without affording me a fiftieth part of the pleasure!

But the very day after Fitzirnham's visit brought the Duke of Rochester, with tickets for the commemoration.

"I will not embarrass you by inquiring the cause of your sudden disappearance from Rochester House," said he, taking me aside after having presented them to his sister-in-law. "Let me simply assure you of the unfeigned pleasure it would give me to see you there again. I had hoped, indeed, my dear Miss Mordaunt, that when others with heavier claims could spare you, you might have been tempted to become the permanent inmate of the Duchess?"—

"I am so unfortunate as to have incurred her Grace's displeasure," I replied, dreading all explanation on the subject.

"Will you permit me to offer myself as mediator between you?"—he kindly inquired.

"If I am to infer the disposition of her Grace from my own," said I, trying to smile off my consternation, "mediation might only widen the breach. But I gratefully thank you, my lord, for this, as well as a thousand other tokens of kindness."

"You would prove your gratitude better, by returning to Rochester House," said he, taking my offered hand, "than by formal compliments. Or if you *must* compliment, may I not transfer your courtesies to the Duchess?"

"Willingly,—if your Grace will undertake the responsibilities of the message," I replied; and I soon found that he had taken me at my word.

A few days afterwards occurred the first concert of the Commemoration, which I attended with Lady Carleton; and never can I forget the imposing,—the almost superhuman solemnity of those five hundred human voices, echoing in harmonious diapason through the aisles of the old abbey. My very nature seemed subdued by the thrilling grandeur of the opening chorus: but could any thing at that moment have increased my satisfaction, it would have been the Duchess of Rochester seated opposite, in a prominent position between her two eldest girls; looking not only handsomer than I had ever yet beheld her, but perhaps the most beautiful woman present on the occasion.

"Lizzy," said she, approaching me in her usual ingratiating manner, when, at the close of the oratorio, we were making our way with the crowd towards the sortie,—"let there be peace between us! I dare say I was wrong to

quarrel with you—*you* were wrong to provoke it. I have missed you, child,—I trust you have missed *me;* and now let by-gones be by-gones.—Lady Helena! go and pay your respects to Lady Carleton, and try to persuade her to give us the pleasure of her's and your cousin's company to-morrow at dinner, at Rochester House."

CHAPTER X.

Though unwilling to reject the offered olive-branch, I had little inclination to become a permanent visitor to the Duchess. Foreseeng painful perplexities in such a position, I preferred the routine of Jermyn Street, and the unaffectionate toleration of the Viscountess, to the hazard of witnessing follies, as impossible to approve as dangerous to condemn.

But Lady Carleton had by this time discovered that an indigent niece, even though handsome and well-born, is not readily disposed of; and that her house had little attraction for the class into which it was her interest to introduce me. Sir Claude Lovell, in short, had not made his appearance in Jermyn Street, while Algernon Rawborne was a fixture in the house, and in the interests of her nephew, her niece, and her jointure, she now decided that the Duchess of Rochester's invitation was to be accepted.

"It was too late," she said, to raise objections—the mischief was done. Fairly launched in the dissolute coterie of Lady John, it was there only I should meet with an establishment." She gave me my choice, in short, between Spetchingley and Rochester House!—But how to return and augment the burthen of my father, when every letter received from Jane and Helen, tended to prove that our fears concerning the state of his affairs, were only too cogently grounded!—

While we were discussing the question of, "to go, or not to go," previously to dressing for the dinner-party, Algernon arrived to give me the full benefit of his support. Without admitting my motives for declining the visit, I expressed my disinclination; and my cousin, probably di-

vining my objections, affected to place them to the account of Carlton House.

"I admit the justness of your observations," replied the Viscountess, "but Miss Mordaunt has advanced too far to recede. In defiance of my counsels, she chose, in the first instance, to glitter her day among those whom the vulgar call fashionable. Had she contented herself with *my* humble sphere of society, this house would have remained her home; but after having branded herself in the public eye, by association with all the notorieties of the day, she must rely on her beauty and the Duchess of Rochester to assist her in forming a marriage, among those to whom reputation is a matter of indifference."

"But you do not surely wish to drive my cousin into the society of profligates and"—

"You do not, I hope, intend to stigmatize the society of your favourite aunt by such a term?" interrupted Lady Carleton.

"Rather that of the Prince," said I, "to which, madam, you will admit that the public is in the habit of attaching epithets equally injurious."

"All *that* is over!" replied Lady Carleton, with a sneer. "The Prince is now honourably attached, and pursuing an honourable courtship. The Duc de Chartres complains sadly of the decorous indecorum of Carlton House, and the dull regularity of its irregularities. I am told, we are soon to behold '*Ich Dien*,' transferred to the feet of the Roman Catholic widow, who has ventured back again from the Continent. Our illustrious Benedick is, or is to be, a married man."

"Absurd! ridiculous!" cried Algernon.

"Why ridiculous?" demanded Lady Carleton. "Have we not lately seen the illegitimate daughter of Sir Edward Walpole, and the widow of Squire Horton, united with the Princes of the Blood?—And had not the two much-lauded queens bestowed on us, by the glorious revolution, a Miss Ann Hyde for their mother?"

"To which derogations we are indebted for the despotic provisions of the Royal Marriage Act!" said my cousin.

"A mere provisional measure;—experimental, as the fancy-farm at Virginia Water. Do you suppose the English will see their princes tied down to the necessity of illustrating their Guelphic blood by admixture with that of

Saxe this, or Hesse the other?—Do you suppose the Prince will not eventually obtain sufficient influence in Parliament to legalize his union with a well-born, well-bred English-woman of unblemished reputation?"

"I am certain, at least, that he has not stability of mind to persist in the attempt," replied Mr. Rawborne, with a smile. "But while the influence is growing, and the act repealing, my cousin will still be a guest at Rochester House,—a circumstance, I am convinced, you will ultimately find cause to regret;—therefore"——

"We will discuss your profound convictions another time," observed my aunt, pettishly. "It is time to dress for dinner."

An incident occurred in the course of that evening, however, of which the poor Viscountess entertained little apprehension. Approaching me, while my two aunts were engaged in earnest conversation, Algernon Rawborne made me an offer of his hand!

"I am only too fully aware," said he, "of the inadequacy of my position in life to your claims and desires. But, in becoming mine, dearest Lizzy, you would at least be assured of a tranquil and happy home,—of a heart devoted to you,—of a hand prompt and strong in your defence. Even these I should not presume to tender to your acceptance, were I not aware that troubles you know not of await you at Spetchingley, and perils which, alas! you are beginning to understand, under the protection of the Duchess. Mr. Mordaunt's affairs are desperately, I fear hopelessly, involved."

I trembled!—His announcement of the fact I had so long anticipated, drew my attention more perhaps than it ought, from the generosity of his proceedings towards me; for poor Algernon immediately attributed my emotion to a cause more flattering.

"Speak!" he whispered, his eyes sparkling with awakened hope. "Am I so fortunate as to obtain your attention?—Dare I flatter myself?"

"Alas! my dear kind cousin, I am thinking only of my father,"—said I, deeply affected,—"my poor father!"

"Pardon my too abrupt allusion to circumstances, the knowledge of which I judged essential to your present decision," observed Algernon, in an altered voice. "Were not your own prospects so precarious—did I not see your

comfort, your respectability, in danger, I should not venture"—

"Away with this misplaced humility, my dear cousin!" cried I. "Do me the justice to believe that worldly interest would influence me in favour of no man. Toward you, Algernon, nothing can increase, nothing will diminish, the warm regard with which our first interview inspired me. But, hackneyed as is the phrase, I know no other to express my feelings than that my affection for you is that of a sister."

"I knew—I knew there was no hope for me!" cried my cousin. "Yet, situated as you are, how could I do otherwise than incur the hazard of passing in your eyes for a presumptuous coxcomb!"

"You have no right to doubt my gratitude towards one so uniformly my friend!" I replied, grieved by his undisguised distress.

"Gratitude!—Do I ask it?" cried he. "One syllable intended to inspire me with hope, were worth a thousand such protestations. For I know you, Lizzy; I know and appreciate your conscientiousness; even compassion would not betray you into suggesting expectations which it was not your intention to gratify."

"Most true!—Nay, to prevent the possibility of misunderstanding, I throw off all womanly reserve, and frankly tell you that—"

"No! do not tell it me," interrupted Algernon, turning deadly pale, and laying his hand imploringly on my arm. "If I am to learn that you love another, let it be from other lips than your's. I do justice, Lizzy, to your motives; but spare me!—I have not courage to hear that you are about to bestow yourself on one who has won your affections; only as it might have been *my* fate to win them—on one for whom you will have more to brave and to renounce, than even as the wife of your cousin."

"You mistake me," said I. "I was about to confide to you that I had bestowed my affections on another; but I have not the slightest reason to suppose Mr. Fitzirnham otherwise than indifferent towards me."

"You are not sincere, *now!*" said Algernon. "You cannot be so blind—so perversely blind—as not to see that you are dear to *him* as to myself."

Oh! how I loved him for the word! What a weight of care did it serve to remove from my bosom.

"You *must* perceive that Fitzirnham loves you as I do; no,—not as I do;—none, Lizzy, can love you as I do, with a tenderness that places your happiness far above my own; but as much as his worldly nature is capable of loving."

"Then why not avow his affection?" said I, faintly.

"Because he is ignorant of the peculiar circumstances of your family, which might enhance in your eyes the value of a home and settlement in life of moderate brilliancy."

"He estimates himself with strange humility! Methinks the attachment of such a man"—

"Enough—enough!" said Algernon; "Spare me the anguish of hearing the avowal of your sentiments; and believe that, however circumstances may tend to disunite us, *my* feelings, Lizzy, will remain unchanged. Do not suppose that, because you reject the lover, you have lost the friend."

This declaration was the only consolatory circumstance attendant on my re-inauguration at Rochester House!

But the very day following my return, Fitzirnham appeared among a large party of dinner guests; for, notwithstanding the animosity of the Duchess, he was established as one of the habitual visiters of the house—perhaps on political grounds; for the result of the recent elections seemed to necessitate redoubled zeal and concentration in the Foxite party. The increasing popularity of Pitt, fostered by the favouritism of the King, had produced public disturbances in the metropolis; and as an evidence that politics were then "in *fashion*," be it remembered that the hottest of the war occurred in St. James's Street, in a skirmish between the chairmen of Brooke's and the other clubs, who performed a tilting-match with their chair-poles!

But though almost all the distinguished guests of Rochester House marked that they had been aware of my absence, by compliments on my return, Fitzirnham alone saluted me with an air of vague and unmeaning courtesy, turning away to enter into a playful war of wit with Miss M., the sprightly and fashionable sister of Lord Galway.

Infinitely piqued by his indifference, I was delighted to find myself placed at table next Sir Claude Lovell, who, roused from his usual torpor to a fit of sentiment by meeting me again, enabled me to conceal my mortification at the neglect of another. It was in vain, however, I played off my girlish airs of coquetry: Fitzirnham remained im-

perturbable; and the account he was receiving from "little Monckton, the gay and genteel," (as she was aptly qualified in the verses of Bishop Marlay,) of an Archiepiscopal dinner given in Dublin, to the beautiful Duchess, its Vice-Queen, kept him and all around him in continued laughter. Nothing is so irritating as the unexplained laughter of others, when one's heart is bursting with vexation.

The tiresome dinner was over at last; and the weather being sultry, the Duchess established herself for the evening in the book-room opening to the garden.

"What have you been doing with yourself this age, my dear?" inquired Miss M——, drawing me to the stone terrace fronting the house. "I was in hopes, my friend, the dear Duchess, had suppressed you altogether, to leave some chance for my *beaux yeux;* but your absence rendered the brilliant Fitzirnham dull as a rainy day, and left Sir Claude most provokingly at liberty to bestow his tediousness upon all the world; so, when next you eclipse yourself, take him with you, I beseech you, into the shade, and reconcile us to your absence."

"Surely you can afford dunce-room to a single blockhead in your gay coterie of wits?" said I,—"one pennyworth of bread to so monstrous a quantity of sack!"

"Very well—very well indeed!" said Miss M—— in a patronizing tone. "Duchess, you really must not bestow this promising child upon so 'capital a calf' as Lovell. There is nothing heroic in being sacrificed to a minotaur, whose monstrosity consists in a *tête de veau!*"

"You underrate Sir Claude Lovell," said I, piqued into taking up his defence, "Sir Claude does not pretend to *bel-esprit*, he is content with that far more uncommon quality, common-sense;—and has, in fact, a great deal to say for himself.

"I hope so;—I am sure he has said none of it at present. To what account does your Grace intend to turn this delicious moonlight?"—said she, interrupting herself to address the Duchess. "A moonlight night without nightingales or french-horns is as disappointing as our marble Venus, dear Lady William."

"I have nothing in view," replied my aunt. "Lady Essex's death has put off the supper to which I was engaged at the Vernon's. My *ennui* is quite at your disposal."

"The river would be charming to-night, Could we not sup at Vauxhall?"

"Too late!—Had you sent me a little word this morning, we might have had boats and music."

"But can't we make it a frisk,—send some one down to Westminster and take what we find?"—

"Some one is no one. My groom of the chambers is a Swiss; my footmen, Irish giants. I have not just now a soul in my establishment whom I can trust with a message."

"The Duke is as good a manager as Garrick!—But what is become of Algernon Rawborne?"

"His cousin there sent him away last night with eyes as red as poor Bentinck's over-rouged cheeks;—I don't expect him here again these hundred years."

"And Fitzirnham?"

"Oh! Mr. Fitzirnham is a vast deal too consequential to be troubled with commissions?"

"Consequential?—Ridiculous!—I concluded you had him here on the express condition of fetching and carrying."

"I am in no situation to make conditions!" replied the Duchess, with a heavy sigh. "Like His Majesty's loving lieges, the nation, I accept the burthens imposed upon me, and cry, God save the King!"

"Fitzirnham has great abilities," observed Miss M——. "It is a pity he was thrown out of parliament. A clever man belonging to a party in the dumps, should be in the house for his own benefit, and the benefit of all other houses. One profits by the leisure of a singing bird, but a tame owl in one's aviary is a sad thing for the linnets and canaries. All this, however, does not help us towards Vauxhall?"

"Our men are going down to the house. We should have no one to sup with us but Lovell."

"Can't you send to White's!—Lord Pembury will be sure to be there. Tell him to get us Fitzwilliam and St. Leger."

"You might as well try to get the Prince or Sir Brook Boothby. I hate impromptu parties;—one is forced to be content with gathering together the halt and the blind."

"But Lord Pembury is both *leste* and *clairvoyant*?"

"To tell you the truth," said the Duchess, lowering her

voice, "I am under restrictions. Were I to send to Pembury, it would be as the King did to the Duke of Portland, to tell him not to come."

My suspicions were by this admission fully verified. There had been an explanation between the Duchess and her husband; and thus the difficulties of my position seemed removed. But, while the Duchess, who had taken Miss M——'s arm, was sauntering with her round the gardens, whispering further secrets, Fitzirnham entering the room to look for his hat, in order to hasten to the house, could not, on finding me thus alone, neglect the opportunity for an ungracious word.

"Miss Mordaunt has received so many compliments on her return to this house," said he, approaching the window where I was standing, "that she will readily bestow her forgiveness on the one *real* well-wisher, who dares express his sincere regret on seeing her enter it again."

"It is to the Duke and Duchess of Rochester your apologies are due," said I; "for *me*, I can scarcely imagine my presence or absence a matter of importance to those who, oppressed by the multiplicity of their friendships, have little leisure for an insignificant acquaintance."

"I am happy to know that you cannot allude to myself," replied Fitzirnham, trying to assume a tone of pleasantry. "*I*, who am *all* leisure—thrown out by my constituents—thrown off by the gay world as a mope, and by the grave world as a rattle, *I*—But why affect this nonsense, this impertinence!"—cried he, observing the disdainful expression of my face, "when in truth I am occupied only with the vexation of finding you here! Tell me! dearest Miss Mordaunt, what evil chance has brought about the reconciliation?—I was so happy to know you safe amid the monotonous decorum of Jermyn Street! Every day, as I looked up towards your windows, I congratulated myself that *ennui* was now the only evil impending over you."

"And what have I to dread here," said I, struck by his earnestness, "saving the caprices of a temper, which you and all the world have conspired to spoil?"

"*Temper!*" he retorted, with a contemptuous smile; "talk to me of faults of temper in a negligent mother,—an unfaithful wife!"

"You do not think me capable of listening to aspersions

on one from whom I am receiving kindnesses and obligations!"—cried I, in dismay.

"Fatal kindnesses!" he replied, unabashed by my indignation; "destructive obligations!—Forgive me! I know I am trespassing on your forbearance; but when I see you surrounded by the meshes of a web of hypocrisy and deceit"—

"The Duchess and her friend are yonder," said I, pointing to the garden, where I discerned the gleam of their white dresses among the yew trees."

"I know it.—I have but a moment for warning,—not *one* for apology!—Do not, I beseech you, accompany the Duchess to Brighthelmstone!"

"Accompany her *where?*"—said I, fancying that he alluded to some scheme of diversion for the night.

"To Brighthelmstone!—Her Grace has acquiesced in the Duke's desire to have you here, solely as a plea for your accompanying her to the coast. The Prince has hired a house for the summer,—the Duc de Chartress will visit him, the Pemburys—the whole set will be there. Avoid it as you would a pestilence!"—

"But will you not explain how those whom you call your friends"—

"Hush!" interrupted Fitzirnham, pointing to the door leading to the dining-room. "They come! resent my counsels if you will, but follow them. I appear officious, impertinent.—No matter,—so I have but influence to prevail with you."

At that moment, the joyous laugh of Charles Fox resounded in the gallery, and the Duke of Rochester accompanied him into the room.

"The hat not yet found?"—cried the former, who had been waiting for Fitzirnham that they might go down together to the House. "I would discover the source of the Niger in half the time!—Dear Miss Mordaunt, take pity on a silly youth who has lost his hat and his heart, and let us go.—Not another blush,—not another smile, I entreat you; or my friend Rochester's horses will be kept waiting another hour."

I would not have blushed could I have helped it, at this annoying apostrophe; more especially as the Duke was evidently displeased at finding me *tête-à-tête* with Fitzirnham.

"Duchess!" resumed my illustrious tormenter, address-

ing my aunt, who just then re-entered the room, "have you any commands for Brighthelmstone?—To-morow being *dies non* with the slaves of the nation, I have promised to drive down with the Prince, and return the following morning."

"I have no commission with which I need trouble you," —replied the Duchess, evidently embarrassed.

"Commissions for Brighthelmstone,—my dear Mr. Fox!" cried Miss M., affecting to look aghast, "I should as soon have expected Lunardi, previously to his ascent, to ask one's orders for the moon."

"Her Grace perfectly"—

"My dear Fox,—suffer me to retort upon you!" cried Fitzirnham, taking pity on the embarrassed position of the Duchess; "the carriage has been twice announced, and the Duke of Rochester is waiting."

And mingling apologies and adieus, the best-natured of men readily accepted the hint, and led the way out of the room.

"What is all this?—What mystery has Charlie blundered out?"—inquired Miss M., the moment the doors had closed upon them. "Have you committed a murder at Brighthelmstone,—or have you any other crime in contemplation that you blush so heinously?"

"The crime of wishing to pass a few weeks there at the time the Prince, the Duc de Chartres, Mr. Fitzherbert, Mrs. St. John, and fifty other people will be enjoying summer bathing. But you are to learn that this dear Duke of mine is what Louis le Grand used to call his parliament *récalcitrant*, and insists on carrying me and mine to Vere Court in Lancashire, where I insist on not being carried. I am, therefore, keeping snug my Brighthelmstone project, till it is convenient to me to become indisposed, and persuade old Warren that I cannot be cured without the aid of sea-breezes. Of course, the Prince is in my secret; and as he tells every thing to Charlie, who tells every thing to every body, the poor dear Duke was very near being introduced behind the scenes, instead of into a side-box."

"Apropos, to side-boxes,"—said little M.,—"are you going to this thing at Richmond House?"

"What thing?"

"The Way to Keep him rendered The Way to Lose him, by the vile acting of Mrs. Hobart, as the Widow Bel-

mour?—They say she has had lessons of Abington and Miss Farren; but yesterday at the rehearsal all was so absurd, that I was forced to bite my lips till I came out of the House, pouting like one of Charles's beauties!"

"Had you said Charlie's you might have been nearer the mark. And, by the way, if you see him to-morrow, pray scold him to death's door for his indiscretion about my *petite maison* on the Steyne. Above all, bid him take better care for the future."

"I believe he could as easily keep his own money as any other person's secret," replied Miss M., yawning. And presently, finding all hope of Vauxhall at an end, she rattled away the Duchess to a brag-party at Mrs. Crewe's, which served to amuse them till sun-rise. In such diversions, my aunt never wished me to join; I was, therefore, left at home to ponder on all I had heard and all I had to apprehend; on Fitzirnham's strange inconsistency, and the vehemence with which he had at length broke silence.

"After all," was the conclusion of my cogitations, "if I find reason to fear unpleasant results from this mysterious trip to the coast, it is but to get myself recalled to Spetchingley. Though I would fain relieve my father from an additional burthen on his embarrassed fortune, it must not be at the expense of his daughter's peace or character."

These plagues and perplexities, like Jaffiers, kept me all night waking; and, at an early hour of the morning, soon after I had fallen into a sleep so deep as to prevent my hearing the Duchess's carriage drive back into the court-yard, I was awoke by her Grace's Swiss chambermaid, Mademoiselle Aglaé, with a face full of importance, and the news, that "*un beau Monsieur,—un jeune homme tout-à-fait comme il faut*," was waiting for me in the library.

"At *this* hour?" said I, rubbing my eyes, and starting up. "It is, perhaps, my cousin, Mr. Rawborne, or Lord Medway?"

"Neither one nor the other."

"It is Mr. Fitzirnham, then," cried I, trembling with agitation, as I commenced a hurried toilet."

"*Qu'est-ce que c'est que Monsieur Feedsairm?*"—inquired Mademoiselle Aglaé in her turn.

"A gentleman who is frequently here, who dined here yesterday."

"*Ah? oui—Je sais bien*," cried the chambermaid, lacing

me crooked in the earnestness of her gossipping.—"*Celui qu'on appelle parmi les valets-de-chambre, l'éponge de Monsieur le Duc; qui avale les couleuvres de Madame la Duchesse, et les diners de sa Seigneurie!*"

Scorning to take up the defence of Fitzirnham against a chambermaid, I inquired whether *l'éponge* were the *jeune homme comme il faut*, who was paying me so untimely a visit.—But no; it was not the *avaleur de couleuvres* (anglice toad-eater) of the family;—it was a stranger; and I now began to suspect that Aglaé's inference might be correct; and that, like some princess in a fairy tale, I was about to be wooed by a romantic suitor, who, having fallen in love with my picture in the print-shops, was come to demand my hand.

I even chose to be accompanied by the *soubrette* to the threshold of the library, where, in two seconds, I was encircled by two eager arms, pressed to an affectionate heart, and saluted by the earnest voice of my brother, Harry Mordaunt, whose "How came you in this house?" was readily answered by "Against my will, and that of my two aunts:" while, to *my* inquiries of "what are you doing in town," he replied, that the long vacation had commenced, and that he was on his way to Spetchingley.

"And Richard?—

"Richard travels characteristically, by the day-coach. He takes too much care of himself to venture into the mail and the night air. About the middle of to-morrow, you will, perhaps receive a visit from him."

"Poor Richard?"—

"Poor Richard,—who will end by being the richest of the family; for he receives little, but spends nothing. You are happy here, my dear Lizzy?—interrupted my brother.

"Very happy," I replied, in an embarrassed tone.

"'How came Lady Carleton to make up her mind to part with you?"

"My aunt is not rich"—

"That part of the obligation I settled beforehand. Not to leave my dear sister with half my allowance, when she was ill at ease. I bribed Lady Carleton to receive you."

"Dear Harry," cried I, throwing myself into his arms, and more gratified by the discovery of his generosity than

disturbed by the meanness of my aunt,—"How shall I ever return the kindness of so good a brother!"

"By submitting in some measure to his guidance," replied Harry, gravely. "For I *must* scold you Lizzy;—I *must* express my regret at the imprudence which rendered you a public mark for the"—

"Hush, hush,"—cried I, closing his lips with a kiss.—"Your warning came too late, but it was not given in vain. For the future, rely upon my discretion."

"And this Sir Claude Lovell, whom the world informs me I am to have for a brother-in-law!"—

"Certainly not by an alliance with *me!*"

"Then why prolong his attentions?—Why not dismiss him at once?"

"The Duchess will not hear of renouncing the allegiance of the proprietor of four boroughs."

"Detestable system!—This is precisely what I apprehended!"

"Believe me, you have nothing to fear; I am no longer the simple girl I was at Spetchingley.

"Alas! that you should say so,—and that I should *have* to believe you!" ejaculated my brother.

"Do not put an unfair construction on my expressions, my dearest Harry; I mean only that I am no longer to be misled by the arts of the Duchess of Rochester."

"The *arts* of the Duchess?—You alarm me more and more!" cried my brother. "Explain yourself!—Is it possible that a sister of our excellent mother could"—

"Not so loud!" said I, dreading that this explosion of his wrath might be overheard; "You mistake me altogether. My aunt is, as you know, a woman of the world—"

"And *such* a world!"

"Who professes a superficial morality,—the hollowness and danger of which I have been so fortunate as to discover in time."

"Would you had never come here!" interrupted Harry. "I have half a mind to carry you off at once to Spetchingley!"

I trembled! After my recent conversation with Fitzirnham, it would now have been pain and grief to me to abandon London. But Harry's next sentence relieved my momentary fears.

"Nor should I hesitate," he continued, "but that I have

just received a letter from my father, bidding me lose not a minute in joining him; in half an hour, I shall be on my road. If, as I greatly fear, his message should regard some unforeseen embarrassment to free him from which my co-operation is necessary, your arrival at home would be ill-timed. All this I shall ascertain on reaching Leicestershire, and nothing will be easier for me than to return and fetch you. Remember, therefore, my dear sister, that I rely upon your prudence, your *honour*, to apprize me, should the slightest incident occur to render your residence here"—

"Cousin Lizzy!—dear cousin Lizzy!"—interrupted a strange voice; and scarcely less to my surprise than delight, Lady Helena de Vere and her sister Isabella came bounding into the room.

"At what o'clock are we to be admitted to mamma? This, you know, is the day appointed for us all to visit Sir Ashton Lever's museum. The carriage was sent early —and here we are!" said Lady Isabella, throwing her arms round my neck, and covering me with the profuse ringlets of her long flaxen hair. And thus I was opportunely relieved from embarrassing inquiries on the part of Henry, whom I presented in form to his little cousins.

"Are *you* cousin Lizzy's brother Henry?"—inquired Helena, frankly offering him her hand. "And are you come to live with her at Rochester House?"

"No,—I am on my way to her home and mine, at Spetchingley Park."

"Has cousin Lizzy a home?—Then why don't she live at it?"—inquired Isabella, in all the giddy joy of a day's escape from the three governesses. "It is so delightful to be in one's own home, with one's own papa and mamma! *We* do so hate Beaufort Lodge, where we are moped up away from every one. Lizzy! you promised to drive down yesterday and see us?"

"It was not convenient to the Duchess to let me have the carriage."

"If I were you, I would stay in my own home, and have a carriage of my own?"—cried the light-hearted girl, who was instructed in all possible branches of learning, but left in utter ignorance of the usages of society;—"and then you would often come and see us, would you not?—You are almost as kind and good as papa!"—

"Do you not see that Miss Mordaunt wishes to be alone with her brother?" said the sager Lady Helena, rebuking her.—"Come away."—

But on this hint, my brother rose to take his departure; and right thankful was I to my little cousins for having secured me from interrogations, which it was becoming painful to me to answer with the degree of sincerity due to my brother.

CHAPTER XI.

It is always a suspicious circumstance when a wayward wilful woman becomes suddenly amenable to the authority of her husband. I own my surprise was excited when the Duchess, whose engagements prevented her devoting the day to the little girls, desired me to take them, after viewing the Museum, to visit their aunts Carleton and Shanstone.

"The Duke seems anxious," said she, "that they should keep up the ceremonial of relationship. I fancy our entirely beloved brother, Lord Hugh de Vere, preaches family union as the first of Christian virtues; for Rochester would fain have me live surrounded by my kindred, as if installed in a family vault. As regards the girls, however, it is easy to oblige him; take care only that Lady Carleton does not stuff them with stale cake, or Lady Lavinia with Whitfield's staler catechisms."

We obeyed her; and if any thing could surprise me more than her Grace's fit of conjugal obedience, it would have been to find established at Lady Lavinia's that solemn formal personage my brother Richard. The Shanstones offered for him,—what he seemed little inclined to offer for himself,—an apology for his visit to his cousins, previous to his sister; and I now discovered that a sort of controversial correspondence was kept up between Lady Lavinia and her nephew, which seemed to include denunciations against all the rest of the family; nay, her ladyship became, even in my presence, so personal in her condemnations of the wicked ones of her tribe, that I longed to inquire how

Lord Medway chanced to escape being included in the commination.

A week after this day of surprises, the Duchess began suddenly to complain of indisposition; and when I heard her at the close of supper, one Saturday night, after the opera, desire the groom of the chambers to take care that Dr. Warren was sent for on the following day, I was for a moment stupid enough to believe that the lady I had seen a moment before laughing and chatting, all grace and loveliness, with Colonel St. Leger and Mr. Grey, was attacked by serious illness. I offered to sit up with her; and instantly detected a playful smile of triumph in her eyes, at the idea of having deceived me. Next day, the Duchess was *en petite santé*,—wore a cap,—her hair unpowdered,—exchanged her hoop for a negligé, and looked more charming than ever. Fitzpatrick, who happened to drop in as Warren's carriage drove from the door, addressed her a few impromptu verses of compliment on her indisposition, which repeated that night at White's, sent all London with inquiries to the gates of Rochester House; and it excited no surprise when some days afterwards the newspapers announced, with their usual specious plausibility, that "as soon as her convalescence permitted, the amiable and lovely Duchess of Rochester would remove to Brighthelmstone for the benefit of sea air." The stage-trick of this little drama was so admirably got up, as to have deceived any one not admitted to the rehersal.

The Duchess, meanwhile, was kind enough to spare me the penance of seclusion which she thought proper to impose upon herself. She sent me under Lady Carleton's chaperonage to her box at the opera, and insisted on my accompanying Mrs. Sheridan to a ball at Devonshire House; and there, for the first time since our explanation, I encountered Fitzirnham. He was not what is termed a dancing man; and when he asked the honour of my hand, I saw that it was merely to insure an unobserved conversation.

"Your brothers have been in town?" said he, as we moved together towards the set that was forming.

"Only for a few hours, on their way from college to my father's house in Leicestershire."

"Too short a time, I fear, to admit of their mixing in the mobs of the gay world, or hearing the gossip of the West End?"

"My second brother is a saint; my eldest, a philosopher," I replied. "Neither of them has in him the making of a man of fashion. They might listen for ever to your scandal of St. James's Street, without understanding one half, or believing the other."

"Lucky they!"—ejaculated Fitzirnham, with a sigh. "But *we*, who live in a mill for the grinding of *Maréchal* powder, must endure the dust we raise and the noise we make!—Half *my* life is past in clubs."

"Political clubs."

"All clubs assume the mask of politics,—as one does a domino during the Carnival,—to be at liberty to play the fool without loss of character. But we were talking of Mr. Henry Mordaunt. Did he see Lord Medway during his stay in town?"

"There is no particular intimacy. Lord Medway looks down on my brothers as country cousins."

"And Rawborne?"

"Algernon was at Brighthelmstone when they were here,—engaging, I believe, a house for his father."

"*Indeed!*" cried Fitzirnham, with an over-clouded brow; "Lord Rawborne going down to meet his sister? An excellent arrangement of his son,—a purely unselfish plan! You have a happy summer before you!"

"I hope so," said I, affecting not to understand his allusions. "I have never even seen the sea, and look forward to a thousand pleasures."

"Better thus, after all; far better thus!" muttered my partner, replying to his own reflections rather than to my observation. "Since such happiness is not for *me*, it were base egotism to wish it denied to another. *I* must not watch over—*I* must not protect her; but better, safe under the guardianship of an honourable man, than left at the mercy of the world"—

"Only of half the world, if you allude to Brighthelmstone," said I, willing to treat his remark as a matter of pleasantry. "We are not sure of the Prince and Carlton House."

"You are sure of the Pemburys and Rochester House!" retorted Fitzirnham, with bitterness. "The Duke of Queensbury—Barrymore, George Hanger, Lade, all those shreds and patches of tarnished lace, that hang upon the tattered mantle of royalty! Already the Prince, finding

his party out of public favour, and consequently useless to his private purposes, is growing out of sorts with politics; and finds the claret drunk with the asses of the Jockey Club as inspiriting as that he used to quaff with the brightest spirits of the times. He accepts excess for conviviality, —he mistakes"——

"Hush!" said I, "yonder comes his Royal Highness, with a fair apology for his faults hanging upon his arm. Rail as much as you please at me and mine, but stop short of high treason, and lead me to my place."

While we danced, I could not but perceive that the eyes of Fitzirnham were fixed upon me with melancholy earnestness. But my observation was unexpectedly diverted by the arrival of Sir Claude Lovell; who, having *par extraordinaire* accompanied the Prince to the ball, thought proper to station himself behind me, as I worked my way up a country-dance of thirty couples.

"So,—Miss Mordaunt—we are to have you at Brighthelmstone, I find?" said he, after one or more audible yawns. "Don't you think it will be deuced good fun?"

"To what do you allude?"

"To Brighton, bathing, driving on the downs, and all that sort of thing. I have built a phaeton not much higher than a wheelbarrow, and my ponies are a hand lower than Lady Lade's. Pray remind me that I have engaged you as my pet for the course, at Lewes races!"

"As you have been at the trouble of making the engagement, I recommend you to be at the trouble of recollecting it," said I with indignation.

"Oh! I never remember any thing but the odds," replied my adorer, with another yawn. "It is such a deuced nuisance to have one's brains stuffed full of dates, and numbers, that prevent one's keeping in mind what it won't do to forget. During that Westminster election,—people used to ask me when I got back to St. James's-street, what was the state of the poll; and by Jove"——

An irritated glance from Fitzirnham, who just then took my hand for our turn in the dance, seemed to reproach me with giving attention to a man whom nothing but an unusual quantity of claret could have elevated to the vivacity of uttering so many consecutive phrases.

"I say Miss Mordaunt, do you know I shan't stand your civility to that chap you are dancing with, if he follows the

Duke down to Brighthelmstone," said Lovell, when I resumed my place. "It won't do, you know, after we're once engaged."

"I do not understand you, Sir Claude," said I, perceiving him to be heated with wine, and anxious to get rid of him.

"Oh! yes, *you* understand me well enough. I mean that the Duchess has been trying her hand to make up a match between you and me: but I can tell you it will be no go, unless I see the course cleared in time."

The variation of my complexion probably indicated to my partner the annoyance to which I was exposed; for instantly crossing the dance, he was beginning to address Sir Claude in no measured language, when, seizing, his arm, I declared myself indisposed, and begged him to conduct me to Mrs. Sheridan. As we quitted the ball-room, I heard the voice of Lovell vociferating after me with the familiarity of intoxication—"I say, Miss Mordaunt, I'm in earnest, it will be no go,—damme; I say it will be no go!"—and as plainly discerned, from the half repressed ejaculations of Fitzirnham, that a quarrel between them was inevitable.

"Insolent coxcomb!"—muttered he. "What encouragement can you have given him, to warrant such presumption!"—

"None—on my honour!" said I, scarcely able to restrain my tears;—and as my agitation visibly increased, I felt my arm pressed under that of my companion.

"Dearly shall he atone every word, every look, that has tended to distress you!"—whispered Fitzirnham, drawing me further from observation into a corridor, decorated with flowers, that led towards the supper-room.

"Any thing but that!" cried I,—"no quarrel—I beseech you!"

"His safety then is very dear to you?" interrupted Fitzirnham, with quivering lips, casting an inquiring look upon my pale face and trembling person. "But whatever insults Miss Mordaunt may choose to support, none at least must be offered to a partner of mine.—Pardon me for leaving you."

"No, no!"—cried I—still more agitated, and clinging to his arm to detain him. "I entreat you to forbear. For my sake, dear Mr. Fitzirnham, let the matter be forgotten."

"Will you permit me to go in search of Mrs. Sheridan?" —cried he, pressing my hand in his.

"*Pray* do not leave me—you MUST not leave me," said I, sinking into a chair, but in my agitation half retaining his hand so as to prevent his departure; and Fitzirnham was perhaps becoming clearer-sighted to the origin of my emotion, for he no longer attempted to quit the gallery.

"If I might presume to hope that this distress had any other origin than the peril of Sir Claude Lovell," said he, his countenance brightening with delight.

"Can you suppose that I wish to see any man exposed to danger for my sake?"

"I dare not, alas! believe you interested in the safety of one so little worthy your consideration as myself," said he, with an inquiring look.

"Believe what you will; but promise me that there shall be no renewal of the altercation, and entreat Mrs. Sheridan to take me away."

He hesitated.

"To what am I exposed!" cried I, overcome by prolonged emotion; and bursting into tears. "Surrounded by dangers which I do not understand,—appalled by mysterious warnings,—without a friend to guide me—without"——

"With a thousand, thousand friends,—with a most devoted heart at your disposal! Give me but the valued right to take up your defence—tell me that no other man has a claim upon your affections?"

"None—none," cried I, startled out of all self-control.

"And that I may trust to time and assiduity to dispose them in my favour?"

"I heard you were ill, my dear Miss Mordaunt," interrupted Mrs. Sheridan, approaching us, having been directed towards the gallery by the rumours of the ball-room; "perhaps you wish to return home?"

"Indeed I do."

"Pray ask for the Duchess of Rochester's carriage," said she, addressing Fitzirnham; "and let us know when it arrives."

And no sooner had he quitted us, than a fresh burst of tears convinced her that something serious had occurred.

"What can I do to assist you?" she inquired, in her usual gentle, soothing voice. "You have had some quar-

rel with that creature Lovell? So much the better! He was every way unworthy of you. I have often reproached the Duchess with favouring his pretensions. Such a marriage would be the vilest of sacrifices!"

"It will never—never take place, dear Mrs. Sheridan!" said I. "But a quarrel has occurred between Lovell and Mr. Fitzirnman. When I am gone, try to prevent their meeting."

"A quarrel between that foolish fellow and Fitzirnham? —How unlucky! But do not be uneasy. My husband has great influence over both. When I have seen you safe into the carriage, I will go in search of Dick, and see what is to be done. Rely upon it they shall not fight if *he* can prevent it."

"Fight! You do not imagine that they entertain such an idea?"

"You say they have quarrelled. Lord Edward Fitzgerald, who sent me in search of you, said something of an insult—an affront—I know not what. At this hour of the night, Lovell is always primed for a quarrel. However, here comes Fitzirnham with your scarf. Come quietly home, and I will return here, and"——

"No—no!—remain I entreat of you," said I. "I am quite able to take care of myself; and you will show me twice as much kindness by staying to confer with Mr. Sheridan."

And at my renewed entreaty, she allowed me to accompany Fitzirnham to the carriage, which he announced to be in waiting. As we traversed the vestibule leading to the stairs, I overheard the angry voice of Sir Claude Lovell in vehement conversation with several gentlemen; and, without daring to turn my eyes in their direction, felt persuaded that they were only waiting the return of Fitzirnham to come to some serious explanation. I had scarcely strength to descend the stairs—scarcely breath to reply to his reiterated inquiries. I felt myself on the point of fainting. Should Lovell and Fitzirnham meet again while the former remained in his present state of drunken excitement, and the latter in his mood of indignation, insults must ensue that could only be effaced with blood!

When I reached the carriage and saw the Duchess's footman holding open the door, a rash thought flashed into my mind which I did not pause to re-consider.

"Come with me to Rochester House," said I, addressing Fitzirnham; "I feel too ill to trust myself alone. I entreat you to accompany me home."

Could he refuse such an invitation, at such a time! —In a moment we were in the carriage together, and rolling towards the distant wilds of "the fieldes by Pancrace."

CHAPTER XII.

It was not till we were on the point of reaching home, that a consciousness of embarrassment apprized me of the indiscretion of my proceedings. In the course of our drive, after much solicitation from Fitzirnham, I had admitted so much of my feelings towards him as to convert his anxieties into perfect happiness; but as he seemed desirous that for a time our mutual engagements should remain a secret, it was impossible to propose our appearing together at that late hour in presence of the Duchess.

"I have little hope of obtaining the approval of the Rochesters," said he; "but a few weeks may enable me to place my prospects in a point of view in some degree worthy their indulgence. Till then, I must deprive myself of the triumph of proclaiming our engagement to the world." And feeling that some little preparation might be necessary to reconcile my own friends to the match, I readily acquiesced in his proposal.

It was some relief, after parting from my now affianced lover,—from the friend—the husband of my choice, to be secure that night from an encounter with the Duke or Duchess; but alas! the following day about noon, I was startled from my reveries by receiving the following billet from Mr. Fitzirnham;—

"Be not uneasy, my dearest and most amiable friend, whatever you may hear concerning my meeting with L——. A slight scratch, to which the surgeons gave twice the importance that is necessary, prevents my flying to inform you that our quarrel is luckily attributed to political causes; and that the world which talks loudest where it is least informed, gives a verdict wholly in my favour. In a day or two I shall be at Rochester House. Meanwhile, all peace and happiness be with you.

"D. V. F."

Neither peace nor happiness, however, obeyed his injunction. I felt convinced, that to spare my feelings, he was making light of his danger; and still more certain that enough must have transpired in the ball-room at Devonshire House, to involve my name in the affair. The Duchess having now reached the third or fourth act of her comedy of the 'Valetudinarian,' confined herself wholly to the house; but of those familiar friends who had the entrée of the boudoir, though all described the duel of the day as arising from a political squabble, and affected to mention it with caution in deference to my position relatively to Sir Claude Lovell, I saw in a moment that my share in the dispute was pretty generally suspected. Among the rest, came Mrs. Sheridan, who had probably been warned by Fitzirnham in what tone to refer to the scene of the previous night; for, to my surprise, instead, of alluding to my illness, she merely whispered *en passant*—"Things had gone too far, my dear. Dick was of opinion that the meeting was inevitable; but the wound is slight, and our hero going on as well as possible."

Fortunately, the Duke dined at the Club; and the Duchess was at all times too much occupied with herself to take note of the pre-occupation of others. But as we were drinking coffee together, a note was brought in which she perused with such evident marks of emotion, that I doubted not it contained the whole history of my folly and its results! In this instance, my self-engrossment equalled the egotism of the Duchess. A moment after she had despatched her answer, her friend Miss M. ran into the room, and after exchanging a few words with my aunt concerning the disordered state of her health, commenced an attack upon me on the subject of the duel.

"So demure as the child sits there over her knotting-shuttle," cried she, drawing upon me the attention of the Duchess, "after having set Brookes's in an uproar, and been burnt in effigy this morning at Pembury House!"

"Burnt in effigy at Pembury House!—What can you mean? I have just had a note from him, without a syllable of allusion to Lizzy Mordaunt!" said my aunt.

"From *him!*—Bah!—The bonfire was kindled by her ladyship."

"And pray, how has this young gentlewoman managed to affect the wiseacres at Brookes's?"

"By a faint,—which was, perhaps, a feint,—last night at Devonshire House."

"You never told me, child, that you had been ill?" said the Duchess, turning towards me.

"She thought, perhaps, you might be incredulous, just now, on the score of illnesses," said Miss M., with a significant glance at her Grace's *demie toilette*.

"Jesting apart, Lizzy, what is the meaning of this?" demanded the Duchess.

"Jesting apart," interrupted Miss M., determined to take the relation into her own hands, "there has been a duel between that good-looking adventurer, De Vere Fitzirnham, and that ill-looking numskull, Sir Claude Lovell, for the love of Miss Mordaunt's bright eyes. Sir Claude was not so sober or so civil as he might have been, last night at the ball; and Lady Pembury's quondam, Sir Lancelot, less forbearing. In short, they met this morning on Wormwood Scrubs, with Colonel Stanhope, and Antony St. Leger, for their seconds; *le beau* Fitz. has, at present, his arm in a sling, and if Warren and common fame say true, may chance to have his neck in a noose after the Quarter Sessions."

"Do you mean that Sir Claude Lovell is dangerously wounded?" said I, throwing down my work, and starting up.

"As if you did not know it?"

Luckily, Fitzirnham's letter of warning occurred to my mind, to prevent my giving too hasty credence to her assertions.

"This is a most mysterious affair," observed the Duchess, gravely.

"And whereas, the next heir of the house of Lovell happens to be a rank Pittite," resumed Miss M., "who would immediately lay his vote and boroughs at the feet of the Treasury Bench, Brookes's has passed a vote of censure on the conduct of Elizabeth Mordaunt, spinster, of Spetchingley Park, as provocatress of a quarrel, likely to lay the doughty Sir Claude with his forefathers."

"And without explaining more distinctly the motive of the duel?" added my aunt, with her eyes fixed on my blushing face.

"A smile more or less bestowed on one or other of her swains," answered her giddy friend.

"The 'one' or 'other' makes a material difference in my

estimate of her culpability," observed the Duchess. "Miss Mordaunt is aware of my desire to promote her marriage with Sir Claude Lovell"——

"It was precisely to such an intention, madam," interrupted I, "that he alluded, publicly, in terms at once so coarse and humiliating as to draw down my tears and the chastisement of Mr. Fitzirnham."

"I wish to heaven you had found some other champion! But, in all honesty, Lizzy, *did* Sir Claude presume to attach disparaging terms to your name or mine?"

"On my word of honour, madam, he *did*,—in an audible voice,—in the ball-room of Devonshire House. Mr. Fitzirnham, whose attentions were originally pointed out to me by yourself, was dancing with me at the time, and resented the insult, as he doubtless would had it been offered to any other partner."

"I do not admit your 'doubtless,' or much admire your want of ingeniousness in not mentioning the subject to me this morning," said the Duchess, coldly.

"I was unwilling to produce any additional anxiety, during your illness," I replied, provoked into offering provocation. And the hit *told*, for I saw an accusing smile reach the Duchess from the expressive lips of her friend.

"Extend your consideration towards me, then, so far as to prevent my having to thank the quixotism of this valiant knight-errant of yours, when he returns from the wars," retorted the Duchess. "I may, however, spare the indecorum of your interference, for before Sir Claude's recovery and his own, you will be giving your sighs to the breezes of the South Downs; and, next winter, I shall take care to purify my society from the presence of such nameless adventurers as your Mr. Fitzirnham."

"He was admitted, I believe, madam, to this house as son to the friend of the Duke of Rochester, and bearing his name!" said I, with a degree of warmth, which I repented the next moment, on hearing the Duchess remark to her friend,—"Noble names are often bestowed on those who need them most; henceforward the Duke's protégé sets foot in this house no more."

The clandestine engagements in which I had involved myself, soon began to weigh heavily on my spirits. Little as the Duchess had done to engage my confidence, I felt that I had no right to deceive a person who stood towards me in the light of the representative of my parents; still less

was I justified in deceiving the Duke of Rochester, who often expressed in my presence a wish that his daughters might resemble their cousin Lizzy. Towards *him*, indeed, I entertained unfeigned and undeviating respect. Still, his virtues overawed me. From the moment of becoming his inmate, I resolved to conquer my girlish timidity in his presence; and now, more than ever, I saw the desirableness of making him my friend. But, alas! I was no longer worthy to approach him with the same open smile and frank cheerfulness as before. I had a secret weighing on my conscience!

Could any thing have consoled me for the painful predicament in which I was placed, it would have been the sympathy testified in Fitzirnham's position, by the most honourable and eminent men of the day. Charles Fox was a daily visiter to his sick-room; and nothing but the political deference due from the Prince to a borough-holding adherent, prevented the demonstrations of his Royal Highness from being equally forcible.

Our correspondence, meenwhile, was uninterrupted; and Fitzirnham had already acceded to my entreaty, that his explanations with my family should take place on occasion of his first visit to Rochester House.

Great, therefore, was my mortification, when, on returning one night from a party at the Duchess of Northumberland's, to which, at the Duchess's desire, I had accompanied her friend Mrs. St. John, I found Mademoiselle Aglaé completing the packing of my dresses, and learned that we were to leave town for Brighthelmstone at eight o'clock the following morning. The Duchess, finding herself worse, had succeeded in obtaining the Duke's sanction to her projects!—Sleepless was that night, sad the journey of that morrow! It appeared to me that no other sixty measured miles of his Majesty's three kingdoms could comprehend half the distance included between Bury-street and the Steyne; and not even my first view of the ocean could divert the profound sadness produced by such startling vicissitudes.

Brighthelmstone, in the month of June, 1784, was nearly as much the fashion as Brighton in the January of 1830. It was the new place, the Prince's whim—the spot to be visited;—in other words, a hot dirty fishing town, without shade or shelter. Little did I imagine, as we took possession of a wretched house on the Steyne, opposite to one scarce-

ly less miserable about to be occupied by the Prince, the site of his future Pavilion, what terraces, what parades, what squares, what circuses, were in the following century to grow out of those chalky cliffs, superseding in the annals of fashion and luxury the triumphant city of Bath!—Three machines and Martha Gunn at that time completed the appliances and means of Brighton bathing; and in place of that new world of flys, libraries, baths, and frippery, which, if there were justice in man, ought as much to be called Georgeville, as America America, or Washington Washington, we found only shingles, broken boats, torn fishing-nets, and whitings' heads.

But the Duchess, a dear lover of excitement, was delighted with the novelty of the scene, and sea-bathing and sea-boating became her passion. Though Brighthelmstone boasted even then its hundreds, where Brighton numbers thousands, she insisted on calling it rural retirement. "It was a place," she said, "where people could do exactly as they liked;" when, in fact, we could not put on our bonnets for a walk, without every soul in the town taking notice of our proceedings.

As far as regarded myself, this *commérage de petite ville* was insupportable. The circle of which, for some time past, I had formed a part, was of so wide and distinguished a nature, comprehending celebrity, talent, rank, and fashion, that I felt at Brighton as if replaced in the narrow orbit of Lady Carleton's dowagers. Between the Duchess and myself there no longer existed a genial feeling of confidence. Though at times fascinated by her inexplicable grace of manner and sprightliness of wit, I could not love a person whom I found professing a two-sided code of morality. I saw that the best of husbands and loveliest of children were not her first objects in life; and was sometimes puzzled to guess what could be the real motive of her restlessness. It was scarcely possible, I thought, for a woman to be so enamoured of the notoriety derived from the homage of society—the newspapers—the mob—as to render it the sole consideration of her existence! Our attention, however, and that of all Brighthelmstone, was soon wholly engrossed by a report of the alarming illness of the Prince; attributed by the court-party to dissoluteness of life, and by his own friends to the despair arising from an unsuccessful attachment. The Duke of Rochester, who remained in town till the close of the session, wrote word

that even *he* was now excluded from Carlton House; that his Royal Highness was in considerable danger; and that the gloom prevalent at Brookes's would probably deprive us of various promised accessions to our society.

I had hitherto supposed the Duchess to be actuated in her vehement party-principles by personal attachment to the Prince of Wales; but now, to my great surprise, I saw her more vexed than afflicted. Instead of entering into the disastrous prospect of losing a Prince from whose liberalism so much good was anticipated,—she exclaimed that, "it was a sad *contre-temps*"—that it was "very unlucky" —"very *tiresome*." I had seen her growing jealousy of the superior influence of Devonshire House and its charming Duchess over the mind of his Royal Highness. Still there was something unaccountable in her insensibility to the danger of one so much an object of interest to all around us, so much an object of admiration to ourselves.

One evening, on our return from a drive on the sands, we found Algernon Rawborne established in our little drawing-room.

"A most agreeable surprise, my dear boy," cried the Duchess, cordially extending her hands. "But your face foretels the nature of a tragic volume. Do you bring us bad news?—is the Prince worse?"

"My face wrongs the nature of my errand," answered he, trying to speak cheerfully; "which is simply to see how you and Miss Mordaunt are going on."

"As well as can be expected," she replied, "considering that we are two town-beauties wrecked on a desolate strand. There is Lizzy, in honour of whose charms lances have been so recently broken—and here am I myself, a breaker of hearts of some dozen year's experience —and not a compliment has reached us (except by the post,) since we bade adieu to the blessed smoke of St. James's."

'Except by the *post*,' sounded in my ears so like an accusation concerning Fitzirnham, that I blushed deeply at the word; but her Grace's thoughts were probably elsewhere, for she shortly added—"And what has become, pray, of all our valiant knights, now that Carlton House is turned infirmary?—Stanhope, St. Leger, Fox,—how are they?—Is Sir Claude Lovell heart-whole, and in whole skin? —and has his impertinent antagonist found his way back again to Rochester House?"

"I have been there only twice since you left town," said

Algernon, replying to her last inquiry, "and both times, the Duke was absent."

"In the body or the spirit?"

"Gone down to Penderels, to lord Hugh de Vere."

"No wonder his letters are so short and sententious, since he keeps such churlish company!" cried the Duchess. "Lord Hugh holds both me and mine in antipathy; for which misfortune I comfort myself by the belief that, like all hunch-backs, he detests every thing good-looking."

"He dearly loves your children, who have certainly no ugliness to recommend them," observed my cousin, gravely. "I fear you have been apt to under-estimate the character of Lord Hugh."

"*Saint* Hugh, as Lady Lavinia calls him; *àpropos* to whom, my dear Algernon, I hope Lizzy Mordaunt's report before we left town was not a true bill?—You surely have not been weak enough to abandon your cause with Clara Shanstone, for that empty-headed, empty-handed, smiling nid-nodding mandarin-like china figure, Lady Emily Beaulieu?"

"Miss Shanstone tolerated me only as Medway's brother; and Lady Emily Beaulieu has long been engaged to my friend Luttrell."

"And what is Medway about?"

"Winning every body's money, and economizing his own. Charles Fox lost twelve hundred to him the other night at hazard."

"After all then, that frightful Lavinia Shanstone will live to be Countess of Rawborne! A man so lucky at cards is sure to have his good luck crossed in marriage!"

"May he never do worse!"—said Algernon, with a sigh. "The Shanstone girls may not be attractive; but they are well principled, and such good daughters will doubtless make good wives."

"What on earth is the matter with the boy and his moralities to-night? He is as peevish as a sick guinea-chick!" cried the Duchess. "How long have you devoted your sighs to homeliness and housewifery?"

"Ever since my fashionable friends fled to Brighthelmstone, and left the town to wretchedness and me!" said my cousin, trying in vain to assume a livelier tone. "But as I have only a few hours to remain with you, and have a thousand things to say——"

"Say them then, for 'tis a thousand years since I've heard any thing amusing."

"I have no news likely to be *amusing*," observed Algernon, with a significant glance towards me, that plainly bade me begone, as he had something disagreeable to say to the Duchess; on which I hastened to leave the room, though unable to remove myself farther than my own adjacent bed-room.

What could be the matter? I saw clearly that Algernon had intelligence of moment to unfold! At first, I naturally attributed his embarrassment to the annoyance of a first meeting with myself; but five minutes' conversation convinced me that my cousin's distresses were not of a selfish nature, but arising from the pain or peril of others. Perhaps he had heard bad tidings from Spetchingly?—Perhaps Fitzirnham—I sunk trembling into a chair—I knew not what to fear? The murmur of my cousin's mild voice, in conversation with the Duchess, reached me at intervals as I clasped my hands upon my bosom; and I could scarcely refrain from rushing back into the drawing-room, and imploring him to tell me the worst.

But I soon discerned from the tone of her Grace in reply, that his communication, whatever it might be, excited anger rather than sorrow—Her voice rose. It was in vain that the persuasive tones of Algernon seemed labouring to sooth her irritation. I could perceive that she was in a furious passion. At length, it was impossible to avoid overhearing her vociferous exclamations.

"No, no!"—she cried: "Excuse your interference as you will, I look upon it as the height of insolence and ingratitude. From your childhood, Algernon, I have dearly loved you, and you should be the last to turn upon me now."

"I would—I will be the last;—But it is my duty to save you from the attacks of others. The world ——"

"I brave it—I defy it!" interrupted the Duchess, in a still louder key.

"You do *not* brave," replied her nephew with firmness, "or instead of being here under the roof of the Duke of Rochester, with an innocent girl for your companion, you would be"——

"Living in open shame with a paramour!—yes—complete your phrase! *That* is what you are desirous of inferring!"

"I would infer nothing to hurt or offend you," answered Algernon, unsilenced;—"but I say again, in honour and

honesty—in deference to your duty to your husband,—your children,—yourself,—your God,—renounce this fatal folly, or you are ruined for ever! The Duke's suspicions are excited. Whether Lord Hugh or others have been the means of rousing them, is unimportant. I protest to you, on my faith and honour, that if Lord Pembury"——

"Protest nothing, for I am not in the mood for patience!" cried the Duchess, with much bitterness. "Algernon! your young heart is no fit umpire for such a matter. *You* know not what it is to have been frustrated in your dearest affections—to have been born a titled pauper,—your daily bread precarious,—compelled to accept the means of safety and subsistence by bartering your bright youth and warm feelings for the cold calculating prudence of a man wanting an heir to his decaying family! Even *there*, too, have I been thwarted. Those lovely girls of mine, a blessing to any other mother, are a curse to *me*. Vainly have I prayed Heaven for a son, to maintain my cause against these detestable De Veres, to be my vindicator with the world, my prop, my stay, my comforter; yet every year has brought a poor weak girl to be the recompense of a mother's sufferings! Without an heir to honour me, I am an object of contempt and disappointment to my husband's family; and it is for this they persecute me. Pembury—you know it—was the lover of my youth,—the lover to whom I should have made a suitable and tender wife. But his father despised my poverty,—forbad the marriage, sent him abroad to remain in exile so long as Lady Harriet Rawborne was undisposed of. I married. He was recalled to England; cajoled into an alliance with an heiress; and because I will not now reject his friendship, and drive him from my house"——

"No!—not his *friendship*," mildly interposed Algernon. "It is because you will not sacrifice his passion to the peace of mind of the best of husbands"——

"Even for that, must I be branded as an adulteress?—What right have you—what right has the world, to deal with me thus uncharitably?"

"The world is a tribunal whose decrees are not to be questioned; but as far as regards myself, my dear aunt, none can dispute *my* right to watch over the credit and happiness of one who was a mother to my childhood, and has been a sister to my maturer years. Medway may limit his zeal to a flippant retort, when he hears your fair

fame called in question at his club, for such is his nature; he would do no more for sister—mother—wife!—But it *is* not *mine;* and if again, after the warning I have ventured to give, I find you exposed to the insolence of a Lovell or the sneers of a Boothby, I will take care to prove to the world, that one man of your blood can resent the imputation on your honour, and that of his family."

The Duchess was silent, awed perhaps by his earnestness.

"I forbid you!" said she, at last. "Your life, Algernon, is worth more than my reputation, such as I have made it."

"Your interdiction is useless! If you would spare your nephew,—your own remorse,—your misery here and hereafter—make me the bearer of a letter to Pembury, terminating this unhappy connexion. One word from you will prevent his coming hither."

"But I am not so poor of spirit as to write it. No!—let the world which has talked so largely—talk on; let Lord Hugh De Vere, who has so long hated and calumniated me, pursue his vindictive triumphs! I am sick of society, Algernon; sick of hypocrisy,—sick of myself."

"And your husband?"

"He will have his children to console him."

"As your's also, may they not chance to forfeit his affection?"

"Let him turn for comfort, then, to his precious son,—the son of whom he is evidently so proud,—the son who affords him living proof of the immaculacy of his youth."

"All this is resentment, not reason," said Algernon. "Let me not feel that my journey hither has been in vain. Send me back happy in the belief that you will seek happiness in the society of your innocent,—your noble-minded niece,—not in the endearments of a profligate."

"You are vastly complimentary to the woman from whose feet you have been spurned!" cried the Duchess, with revengeful malice. "The simple-hearted Lizzy Mordaunt was more than a match, Algernon, for your prudence, when she made you her instrument for drawing on the attentions of"——

"Not a word of Lizzy!" interrupted my cousin, with energy. "Her unspotted name must not be tarnished by contact with a theme like this. Suffer me to bid you farewell; with a hope that time and reflection may accomplish that for

which my persuasions have been insufficient. Should you relent, write to me.—One word would set my anxieties at rest."

"Adieu!" was the sole reply vouchsafed by the Duchess.

"We do not part in anger?" demanded my cousin.

"Adieu!" reiterated the Duchess. I heard the bell ring, —the door close,—and a deep groan burst from the bosom of my imprudent relative. But I was too much agitated, and, I confess, too indignant against her to hasten to her consolation, I felt that solitary meditation might be advantageous to her.

An hour afterwards, I re-entered the drawing-room to be shocked by the heartlessness of her smile and exclamation of—"Well, my dear Lizzy! Algernon is gone. The boy was in so great a hurry to return to town, that he could not be persuaded even to stay and sup with us! To say the truth, I fancy the Shanstones are gaining unlimited influence over his mind: he is beginning to preach and prophecy with a degree of unction, that Praise-God Barebones might have been proud of."

CHAPTER XIII.

The following morning, I awoke from feverish restless dreams to receive a letter from Fitzirnham; a happy letter, for it not only announced his complete recovery but the probability of his arrival at Brighthelmstone.

"You will soon be surprised," he wrote "by a visit from the Duke of Rochester, who is about to escort his two eldest girls to their mother. Very shortly afterwards, dearest, I shall make my appearance; as I wish my explanation with the Duchess to take place in the presence of her husband."

Exhilarated to the utmost by this welcome intelligence, I scarcely knew how to conceal from the Duchess—whose ill-humour produced by her interview with Algernon, was far from evaporated,—the motive of my sparkling looks and irrepressible gaiety. I was ready to sing—to dance—yet it was necessary to subdue my excitement to a more moderate tone. It was not for *me* to announce the approach of her excellent husband, her sweet children; it was not for me prematurely to disclose the secret of my engagement to the man she detested. When peevishly taxed with my unmeaning hilarity, I was forced to attribute it to the tidings contained in the papers of the day, of the Prince's auspicious amendment.

"Yes,—I fancy you may flatter yourself that our summer will pass less tediously than it promised," she

replied with a sneer.—"I heard from Algernon that his Royal Highness would be here at the close of the week; and that the Duc de Chartres was expected over for Lewes races."

I was persuaded that from her nephew she had learned nothing of the kind; but the Duchess had an extensive correspondence, and, among the bulletins of gossip she daily received, these reports might have been transmitted.

"Under such circumstances," she resumed, "I mean to hasten my project for visiting Worthing, Arundel Castle, —perhaps Eastbourne, and Hastings. It will be as well to get over my little tour before the prince arrives, and our golden fetters are fastened on."

A tour?—This was the first allusion I had heard to it! A tour, and on the eve of the Duke's arrival,—of the arrival of Fitzirnham!"

"To-morrow, at an early hour, Lizzy," she resumed, "we will set off. I should have gone to-day, but Algernon's arrival last night proved an obstruction to my plans."

Perplexed as I was, I found presence of mind to stammer out an inquiry as to the probable duration of our excursion; and, on learning that it would extend only to two or three days, and reminding myself that Fitzirnham's expression of "soon" might refer to the period of the Prince's departure from town, with which that of the Duke of Rochester was probably connected, I consoled myself as best I might, with the hope that we should return in time to receive my little cousins and their father,—the harbingers of a still dearer guest.

I hastened to make my preparations for our little journey; but all that day the Duchess continued fractious and uneasy. She continually inquired of the servants for letters, though the London post-time was past, and she had no correspondents at Brighthelmstone. She even despatched messengers to the various coach-offices to inquire for a parcel, but in vain; and, on my venturing at last to advert to the motive of her anxiety, she expressed a hope that Algernon might have left or sent a letter from the road, explanatory of some commission, concerning which he had omitted to inform her. Aware that they had parted in anger, I could not help fancying she had addressed to him penitent and pacific overtures, to which she was eager for the reply.

It was now nearly Midsummer. The weather was sultry; and all that day, a storm had been gathering in the atmosphere, which, towards evening, exploded. The Duchess made it the apology for her flurried spirits: congratulating herself, as the peals of thunder burst over the house and the lightning glared upon the sea, that our tour was refreshed by so welcome an antecedent. At an early hour of the evening she proposed retiring, as we were to be up at day-break; and gladly did I instal myself in my room, and seize the opportunity for inditing a long letter of explanation to Fitzirnham, acquainting him with our projects, and my exquisite delight in the prospect of a speedy re-union.

The storm having subsided, my windows were thrown open for the enjoyment of the freshened breezes during my occupation; and Mademoiselle Aglaé had taken her departure for the night—when I was startled by the sound of an arrival at the house. For a moment, the anxiety of the Duchess throughout the day occurred disagreeably to my mind. But I soon discovered that the visiter was no other than the Duke himself, who had made his appearance, unaccompanied by the girls. I heard him traverse the adjacent drawing-room with eager steps, like a person relieved from the restraint of a summer journey; I heard him decline an offer of refreshment from the groom of the chambers;—I heard Mademoiselle Aglaé acquaint him that the Duchess would be happy to receive him in her dressing-room, and I heard no more. I returned to the completion of my despatches; adding news of the sudden arrival of the Duke, and the probability that new arrangements would take place. At midnight, I closed my letter and my windows, retiring quietly to rest; nor was it till two hours afterwards, I was roused from the sort of dreamy consciousness, between sleep and waking, by a low knocking at the door opening from my chamber to the drawing-room. Supposing the sound to be accidental, I turned disregardful on my pillow. It was repeated; and, quickly rising, I approached the door and demanded who was there.—

"Hush! speak lower!" whispered a voice which I knew to be that of my aunt; "unbolt the door, Lizzy, and admit me."

I obeyed, and was surprised that the Duchess, who had no light, should instantly rebolt the door, and taking my hand, draw me with her in the dark towards the window.

There were no shutters to the room, and the straggling light of an overclouded moon enabled me to discern that she was in her night-dress, as if risen from bed. But when she began to speak, her voice was so changed by struggling emotions, that I felt compelled to take her hand in mine, to ascertain that it was really the Duchess who addressed me.

"Yes, Lizzy,—it is I!"—she faltered—"the most wretched, the most undone of women, unless you mercifully interpose, to save me from a fate that would render my children motherless, and plunge my family into shame!"

"Can you make my acquiescence a matter of doubt?" I exclaimed. "What have you not a right to command at my hands!"

"Not *this*," she replied: "the concession I ask, is one that can only be granted as the greatest of mercies."

"Ask it, then," said I, "that you may see how promptly I can comply with a request of yours."

"Alas! alas!" ejaculated the Duchess; "this confidence on your part wounds me to the soul. I have not deserved it, Lizzy,—I do not deserve it; I cannot accept your rash generosity. No! you must hear all—you must hear the worst—before you undertake to be my preserver. Let us sit down, and enter into the details of this fatal business."

And she fell, rather than sank, into the chair I drew towards her.

"My dear Lizzy—Rochester is arrived from town!" said she, after a heavy sigh, as if to relieve her oppressed bosom.

"I know it, madam; perhaps I was wrong not to apprize you, for I was aware of his coming."

"Such a warning would have saved me from destruction!"

"But my little cousins have not accompanied him; and I understood"——

"He has left the girls at Crawley; left them, and proceeded hither, to ascertain whether I am still worthy to receive a visit from my daughters. Lizzy, it depends on yourself whether they are brought hither to-morrow, or deprived for ever of the protection of their mother!"

"Upon *me*?"

"A letter has fallen into the hands of the Duke, without signature or address,—but, I admit, intended for me."

"And written by Lord Pembury?"—cried I, unable to repress my apprehension.

"Which, were it traced definitely to myself, would determine the Duke to throw me off,—to expel me his house—to drive me into still deeper dishonour. He has told me so, Lizzy!—When he demanded whether indeed these lines were addressed to his wife, he bade me pause ere I replied—for that an affirmative would be the last word he would hear uttered by my lips"——

"And you answered?"—

"Had you seen his noble countenance, pale with suppressed emotion,—had you seen the anguish quivering in his lips."

"And you answered, madam?"—said I—seeing her so careful to evade a direct reply.

"In my place, Lizzy, you would have done as I did!—Were you the wife of such a man, the mother of such children, the occupier of such a position in the world, you would have hazarded every thing to cling to a chance of safety."

"You have not told me what answer you made to the interrogation of the Duke?" I persisted, scarcely able to breathe.

"I told him," said she, in a faint voice, "that I had reason to believe the letter was addressed to my niece."

"You dared not!" cried I, unable to repress my indignation;—"You dared not so calumniate the innocent girl consigned to your care,—the daughter of your departed sister!—You dared not brand me as a wanton,—as an adulteress."

"Forgive me!" faltered the Duchess, throwing herself at my feet.

"No!—this very moment must undeceive him!" I cried, over-mastered by passion. "No living being shall have cause to think thus of me!—I, *I* the paramour of a married man!"

I had risen from my chair, but trembled so violently that I dropped into it again, while the Duchess abjectly embraced my knees.

"*You* are free"—she faltered—"*you* have none to resent your frailties, or to suffer by your disgrace."

"How know you that?"—cried I; "my father,—

brothers,—sisters, are as susceptible of honourable feelings as the Duke of Rochester;—and I have more than even these to grieve over my fall. I have a lover, madam,—yes! an affianced lover—" I paused in time,—the remembrance of my promises to Fitzirnham enabling me to preserve his secret.

"You refuse me, then?" said she, with calmer gestures, and slowly rising from her grovelling position.

"I do!"

"It is well," said she, preparing to quit the room; "I had counted too far on the goodness of your heart. But, since you will not save me, promise me, when I am gone, to be a mother to those children;—promise me——"

"What—what is it you ask of me!" I exclaimed, bewildered by agitation. "This letter which you bid me claim as mine, what do its contents imply? To what degree does it implicate my conduct?"

"I am myself uncertain," said she, gaining courage when she saw me moved in her favour.

"How came it in the hands of the Duke?"

"We were to have breakfasted at Crawley to-morrow morning. Thither Lord Pembury, whom I had appointed to meet us on the road, despatched a few lines of excuse, enclosing his letter to the landlady of the inn, with a request that it might be given to the waiting-maid of the Duchess of Rochester, the moment she arrived. Most unluckily the storm of this evening induced my husband to alight with the girls at that very inn; and the blundering idiot of a landlady, believing herself to be executing her commission, gave the letter to the attendant of Helena and Isabella, who placed it in the hands of the Duke."

"Gracious heavens!"

"Something must have previously occurred to excite his suspicions; for, without hesitation, he opened and perused it,—proceeded hither, resolved upon immediate explanation; and nothing, but the presence of mind with which I parried his suspicions, prevented his immediate departure preparatory to measures for driving me from his house."

"The letter denotes, then, heinous culpability?"

"No—oh! no," ejaculated the Duchess, "culpability only in the eyes of an offended husband. It implies levity, folly—the crime of strong and mutual attachment

between persons whom the laws of religion and morality ought to disunite."

"And you call this all—and would impose such opprobrium on me without scruple!"

"Not without scruple. Hate me as you will, you cannot think me ignorant of the extent of the sacrifice I implore! But it is only the esteem of the Duke of Rochester you would forfeit. He has no duty to perform in exposing *you* to disgrace. Nay! he would doubtless use strenuous endeavours to prevent the secret from transpiring."

"No, it is impossible!" cried I, shrinking, the more I considered the affair, from so odious an imputation. "I have no right thus to trifle with a name, which I received unblemished from an honourable race."

"Hush!" murmured the Duchess, drawing closer towards me. "I have persuaded the Duke to retire to rest. But he might overhear us——"

"Better that he should thus become acquainted with the truth, than that you should have the task of deliberately undeceiving him."

"You do not suppose, Lizzy, that I would live for the attempt. No!—oh!—no;"—cried the Duchess. "I have courage,—but not for this terrible ordeal. Farewell!—when morning comes, I shall be beyond the reach of pity or condemnation. Farewell!"

"Stay!" said I, following and detaining her as she reached the door; "you say you have already inspired the Duke with an opinion that this letter was addressed to your niece. In truth and honesty, madam, how did he receive the intimation?"

"With unconcealed delight! To find *me* innocent—*me*, the mother of his girls,—was all he cared for. It was only after the first moment of exultation, that he exclaimed"——she paused.

"Say on!" cried I, dropping her cold hand.—"What said he then?"

"That Lizzy Mordaunt was the last woman on earth of whom he could have formed an injurious surmise!" faltered the Duchess.

"And you would have me confirm him in his evil opinion?"

"The Duke will but inquire of you, with his characteristic mildness, whether there is a letter waiting for you,

at Crawley. A sign,—a look,—an affirmative word, will suffice:—deny, and I am lost for ever!"

"On one more point, we must understand each other," said I. "Should I consent to this humiliation, the man to whom I have pledged my hand and heart must not receive them as those of a guilty creature."

"Most just;—and this affianced lover of yours is"——

"De Vere Fitzirnham."

"As well reveal all to the Duke!"—cried my aunt, retracing her steps.

"No, madam;—Fitzirnham may be trusted;—nay—he *must* be trusted."

Again she remonstrated, but on this point I was firm; and when, terrified at the possibility of being missed and followed by the Duke, she took leave of me for the night, I had accepted the fatal stigma of her guilt, on condition that she was herself to undertake an explanation of the truth to him whose esteem was indispensable to my happiness.

I have no words to describe the raptures of her gratitude;—I had scarcely patience to support them.

CHAPTER XIV.

I QUITTED my room that morning so pale, so tremulous, so guilty-looking, that my accusation seemed written in my face. Already I had ascertained that the Duke of Rochester was still in the house; and on entering the breakfast-room and confronting him, his benignant countenance, armed for the first time with severity, and his hand for the first time withheld, confirmed the reality of all I had been tempted to hope might prove a horrible vision of the night!

But alas! it was no dream. The Duke, advancing towards me, presented the fatal letter with a cold expression of apology, that a mistake on the part of the person commissioned to deliver it should have induced him to open it; and all that remained for me was to courtesy acquiescingly as I received the paper into my trembling hands. For a single instant, I felt tempted to fall at his feet, and implore him to suspend his judgment on my unworthiness; but a glance from the Duchess, who sat near us—her countenance almost convulsed with terror—served to restrain my impetuosity.

"I have only farther to inquire, at what period it will be convenient to Miss Mordaunt to return to the protection of Lady Carleton?" demanded his Grace, with stately formality. "I have it at heart to bring my elder daughters to Brighthelmstone; and I am under the necessity of conveying them back this morning to town, till the Duchess is free to bestow upon them her undivided attention."

"All these arrangements I will settle with my niece," said the Duchess in a deprecating tone—gasping for breath, lest the insult of finding myself thus expelled her house, should prove too much for my proud spirit.

"I have no wish, my lord, to remain here," involuntarily burst from my oppressed bosom. "A motherless girl, without counsel or protection, has too much to dread in——"

"My dear Lizzy, compose yourself," said the Duchess, whose agitation however far exceeded my own. "The Duke has no accusation to form against you; all will be explained hereafter—all will yet be well."

"All will be well when I am once more under the protection of my father, which I would to Heaven I had never quitted!" cried I. And, while I covered my face with my hands in an agony of tears, the Duchess hastened to take leave of her husband, and persuaded him to enter his travelling carriage, which was waiting at the door.

"I am saved!"—she ejaculated, sinking into a seat beside me, as we heard the sound of departing wheels;—"saved, thanks to your intrepid generosity!"

"Do not thank me!" I exclaimed, putting aside her embraces. "Never was service more unwillingly rendered."

"Your knowledge of the extent of the obligation ought to plead for me!" cried the Duchess.—"Great as is the sacrifice you have made, far greater, Lizzy, is the service you have done me."

"You know not half the extent of the sacrifice!" I replied. "Fitzirnham's position does not admit of an immediate fulfilment of his engagement. Lady Carleton apprized me, when I quitted her house to be your inmate, that I must look for no farther favour at her hands; and this morning's post has brought me a letter from my brother, acquainting me (situated as we are, I can have no concealments from your Grace,) that my father's affairs are desperately involved, and that Spetchingley is about to be shut up for a term of years, to enable my family to economize in some obscure retreat. Such is the moment at which I am thrown back, dishonoured on their hands!"

"Lizzy, Lizzy!—with such prospects, what could tempt you to reject the attentions of Sir Claude Lovell?"—cried the Duchess. "Is there no hope that he might be recalled and induced to renew his overtures?"

"This from *you*, who but last night accused the disap-

pointment of your early affections as sufficient apology for criminality!" I replied.

"But starvation!—ruin!—you would not surely have Fitzirnham make you his wife, with want and wretchedness in immediate prospect?"

"Rather work for my livelihood as the wife of Fitzirnham, than degrade myself by a marriage with a vulgar-minded clod like Lovell," was my reply.

"My poor Lizzy, you talk like other girls of your age, ignorant of the sad realities of life, and credulous in the existence of poetical cottages, and graceful destitution. A woman in the station of Fitzirnham's wife *cannot* work for her livelihood; she has to bear privation—to struggle with penurious gentility—to support the insolence of inferiors—the taunts of creditors;—and, above all, the consciousness that she had broken a noble spirit by withdrawing her husband from an opening career to the obscurity of household life. This is what you would have to endure; *you*, proud, independent, and all impatient of the contumely of the world!"—

"And yourself, Madam," I could not forbear replying, "elevated as you are to the highest enjoyments of rank and opulence—surrounded with the homage of society, the friendship of princes—are you in reality happier than the poor, needy, struggling wife you have described?"

"I have, alas! no longer a right to offer myself as an example," said she, in a dispirited tone. "Yet, could I place myself in your position, I own I should not have courage to surround myself with a necessitous family; for to inflict suffering on those we love, is a greater trial of fortitude than to endure it with submission."

Such a sentiment seemed hollow from the lips of one by whom I had been placed in my miserable position; and the Duchess was conscious of hypocrisy, for she hastily recurred to Fitzirnham; inquiring, with more detail, what were his fortunes—what his prospects in life.

"It is a question into which we have had no opportunity of entering," I replied. "From that disastrous evening at Devonshire-house, when we pledged ourselves to each other, we have never met. He told me he was poor—a younger brother;—that the nature of his political principles prevented all hope of official employment."

I had no need of further explanation. At that moment a note was placed in my hands, acquainting me that Fitzirnham himself was waiting at a neighbouring hotel for

permission to make his appearance, and tender his proposals for my hand to the Duke and Duchess of Rochester. I gave her Grace the letter for perusal; when, pressing her hands upon her forehead, she cried aloud, "Not yet! —let me have some respite!—I cannot see him yet!"—and so great was her agitation, that instead of replying to Fitzirnham, I was forced to devote my whole attention to herself. Her recollection of the contemptuous treatment which Mr. Fitzirnham had for some time received at her hands, conduced, I verily believe, to restore her to self-possession. The apprehension that one whom she had injured and insulted should triumph over her, piqued her to exertion; and, by the time I had succeeded in persuading her to admit him to a conference, the Duchess had assumed the semblance of nearly her usual haughty recklessness.

And it was thus, then, I was to meet him again!—Under what evil auspices, alas! had our ill-starred engagement commenced!—His wound—my degradation!—Instead of the usual delicacies of feeling connected with an interview between an innocent girl and the man to whom she has pledged her faith, I was about to stand before him under the heaviest of accusations, and to entreat his co-operation in a conspiracy against his father's friend.

The Duchess of Rochester was, in fact, the calmest of the three, when I found myself standing beside Fitzirnham, with my hands pressed in his, and his eyes fixed earnestly on my face. The short moments we had passed together after our engagement, made it almost an untasted pleasure to gaze upon his affianced wife—the wife whom he had purchased with his blood—whom he would have purchased with his life!

"I have just heard with regret, that the Duke of Rochester is already off to town," said he, turning towards my aunt. "Is the Prince worse? I had good news of his Royal Highness last night, before I left London."

"The motives of the Duke's sudden departure were wholly of a private nature," replied my aunt, carelessly.

"May I then inquire," he resumed, "whether any period is fixed for his Grace's return? I am most anxious to address to *him*, as to a person biassed in my favour, a demand for the hand of Miss Mordaunt; an honour to which I have so little claim, save that of devoted attachment, that I would willingly intrust my cause to the partial judgment of a friend."

"You do not seem aware," replied the Duchess, "that my niece has a father living, whose authority on such a point must supersede that of relations, however dearly interested in her destiny."

"Accustomed to see Miss Mordaunt installed under your Grace's protection, I fancied your authority all in all," replied Fitzirnham.

"So little so," interrupted the Duchess, "that I am about to lose even the happiness of her society. Miss Mordaunt is likely to return to the care of Lady Carleton."

Fitzirnham turned towards me a countenance glowing with satisfaction at the intelligence.

"Mean while, lest you should at any time hear misrepresented by others, or be inclined yourself to misinterpret the motives of her quitting my house," resumed my aunt, in a most inappropriate tone of levity, "I have undertaken, Mr. Fitzirnham, to inform you, that Lizzy's offence against the Duke of Rochester consists in having kindly taken upon herself the proprietorship of a silly letter addressed to her aunt."

"Offence against the Duke of Rochester, to assure you!" said Fitzirnham, looking infinitely bewildered. "Do you mean, Madam, that Miss Mordaunt leaves your house by compulsion?"

The Duchess was expressively silent.

"Or that the Duke of Rochester cherishes personal resentment against her?"

Not a syllable in reply.

"Your Grace has alluded to a *silly* letter," he continued. "May I presume to inquire, (since it is one which Miss Mordaunt has not been afraid to avow,) in what consists its silliness, and the motive inducing you to require her responsibility."

"The offence of the unlucky letter," said the Duchess, trying to disguise her embarrassment under her usual off-hand manner, "consisted simply in containing those terms of admiration, which jealous husbands seldom care to find addressed to their wives. In order, therefore, to pacify the resentment of the Duke, Lizzy Mordaunt generously accepted these civilities as offered to herself."

"Did you *see* the letter?" inquired Fitzirnham, turning towards me. "Are you circumstantially aware what imputations you may have incurred by your concession?"

"No, indeed;—I simply acceded to the earnest entreaties of my aunt."

Fitzirnham's countenance fell. "But if you are uneasy on that head," I resumed, trembling at his gravity of demeanour, "the Duchess will satisfy you by a sight of the letter, which, after accepting from the Duke, I hastened to replace in her hands."

"If Mr. Fitzirnham thinks it worth while to imply an injurious impression, he must seek the fragments there," answered the Duchess, pointing disdainfully to the fireplace, where lay a variety of torn and defaced papers, but among them, certainly not the letter,—for I had never lost sight of my aunt from the moment when, snatching it from me, she placed it in the bosom of her dress.

"I will not presume to pry into your Grace's correspondence," replied Fitzirnham. "My position with regard to Miss Mordaunt, unprotected as she is among you, can alone justify my venturing to express even an opinion on the subject."

"Which opinion, give me leave to preface by the avowal of my surprise," angrily interrupted the Duchess, "that a person so well trained in the usages of society as Mr. De Vere Fitzirnham, should have formed a clandestine engagement with"——

"That engagement, Madam, is not now the question!" said Fitzirnham, sternly. "I came hither prepared to make overtures for the hand of your niece to the Duke of Rochester;—to him—because his friendship for my family has induced him to pledge himself that, on my forming a suitable connexion, he will push my fortunes in the world."

"His *friendship* for your family!" murmured the Duchess in a scornful but scarcely audible voice.

"And what do I find here?"—continued Fitzirnham. "Instead of a cordial friend, anxious to establish the happiness of two young people who are dear to him, I find the object of my affections branded by the stain of infamy, yes, *infamy!* for the letter of Lord Pembury cannot have implied less, or you would have been less eager to transfer the accusation to another. Is this the protection due to the innocent child of a deceased sister! Is this the justice, Madam, due to one whose good name is her best endowment?"

"To Mr. Fitzirnham, I feel myself in no way respon-

sible," said the Duchess, gradually excited by his eagerness.

"You *are*, madam!" he replied; "your Grace *is* responsible to *me*, as the future husband of the virtuous woman you have injured, even as you are yourself responsible to God, for trifling with your duties as a mother and a matron. You smile!—I can well conceive that the friend of a Du Deffand may scoff at the idea of such liabilities; but the good and the wise uphold me in the opinion, that unchastity is the foulest stain on female nature; and treachery a crime, even in the convenient code of a woman of the world."

"This comes well from you, sir," cried the Duchess, unable longer to restrain her irritation. "If I did myself justice, I should command you to quit my presence—my house! But let me remember what is due to the blood of De Vere, even though flowing through an unlawful channel. That your mother's son should dare to stand up before me, and upbraid me with a breach of conjugal duty, is a sufficient attestation of my forbearance."

"I have not the honour of comprehending you?" said Fitzirnham, every trace of colour deserting his cheek as he listened, and by degrees began to attain her meaning.

"But there may come a moment, when even my patience will be exhausted," she resumed; "and in vindicating my honour from your aspersions, I shall but do justice to myself in closing my doors for the future against the illegitimate son of the Duke of Rochester."

"'Tis false!" cried Fitzirnham, starting to his feet; "false as your own false heart!"

"'Tis *true!*" retorted the Duchess, her countenance gleaming with fiend-like exultation. "The proof is in my hands;—ay! sir; and supported by the ample confession of the Duke of Rochester."

She could add no more. Fitzirnham, staggering to his seat, fell back in a state of total insensibility.

CHAPTER XV.

The Duchess of Rochester considerately left the room before Fitzirnham recovered to be conscious of her presence; and after the confusion and distress I had undergone, I felt that absolute solitude was indispensable to my restoration, as well as to his own. Having persuaded Fitzirnham to return to his hotel, I resisted all the blandishments of the Duchess, and retreated into my own room to seek repose.

Oh! how I felt at that moment the need of comfort—of counsel! In such emergencies, how immeasurable appears to the motherless, the benefit and happiness of maternal protection. Wounded in my feelings—my reputation—my pride, I wanted more than ordinary soothing to restore my peace of mind; and instead of this blessed solace, was forced to immediate action.

There was but one among those on whom I had claims of kindred—to whom I could turn for advice. My own family were too deeply involved in their own distresses to think of troubling them; but Algernon, my friend, my cousin,—my noble-hearted cousin,—was so well versed in the secrets of the Duchess, that I could inflict no injury upon her by taking him into my confidence. Yes! in spite of all that had passed between us, it was on *him* only I could rely; and not daring to refer the subject to Fitzirnham, I sat down and communicated in all minuteness to Algernon Rawborne the difficulties of my situation. The letter might reach him on the following morning; the day ensuing would, I felt convinced, bring an answer for my guidance.

All that day, on the plea of indisposition, I passed in my own room. On the next, by good or ill-luck, there arrived at Brighthelmstone from France the Marquis de Conflans and Duc de Lauzun, to announce the Duc de Chartres; and to these gentlemen the Duchess of Rochester was under the necessity of doing the honours of the place. I declined joining the dinner-party; for my pretext of illness was now rendered valid by two days of intense agitation; and my aunt and her guests were still at table, when, suddenly, I heard a new visiter ushered into the drawing-room; and the welcome voice of Mr. Rawborne, begging that he might not be announced to her Grace, as his visit was expressly to Miss Mordaunt, sounded in my ears like a signal of release from a thousand evils.

"Did I reckon too largely on the sincerity of your professions?" I exclaimed, seizing his hand, and almost overcome by the kindness of this prompt and personal reply to my letter.

"You have done me justice, Lizzy," he replied, "in estimating my feelings by the generosity of your own. You have asked my assistance in the only instance where it could be painful to me to do you service; but that I am here already, must convince you how eagerly I would comply with the slightest of your desires."

"I called upon you, Algernon, as a sister would upon a brother," I replied. "Had not mine been engrossed by more serious duties, I should not have hazarded the chance of giving you pain."

"Would that I alone could be made to bear it on this occasion!" said he, with a deep sigh, placing himself beside me on the sofa. "But, alas! my prophecies have come to pass. You well know, Lizzy, all I felt and feared regarding your journey hither. But with an actual engagement entitling him to control your movements, how, *how* came Fitzirnham to sanction such a measure?"

I briefly explained the peculiar circumstances under which our engagement had taken place.

"And tell me," said he, "since Fitzirnham is prepared for the fulfilment of his pledge, what prospects can he offer to share with you?"

"Of his arrangements, I am still ignorant," said I. "He came hither to submit them to the Duke; but the altercation which occurred with the Duchess, rendered it impossible for him to approach the subject."

I then entered fully into the particulars of that unfortunate interview.

"I will see Fitzirnham the moment I leave you," said my cousin, in reply to my communication. "I need not assure you, Lizzy, that the man to whom you have pledged your hand, is henceforward my friend. But you must not remain here. Within an hour of perusing your letter this morning, I arranged all with Lady Carleton. Do not expect to find her good or generous—but she is willing to receive you into her house; and I came hither in my father's travelling-chaise, that you might return in it to-morrow. Fitzirnham and I will travel back together. By to-morrow evening, you will be reinstalled in Jermyn-street; you must settle with *him* at what epoch you leave it again as his wife."

I had no words to express my sense of Algernon's kindness in these arrangements. "Shall you remain here with the Duchess?" was all I could say in reply.

"No, my patience with her was exhausted at our last interview;—what she has done since is past forgiveness!" he replied. "The injury inflicted on the good name of her sister's child—the aspersion cast on the fame of Mrs. Fitzirnham in presence of her son,—oh! Lizzy, Lizzy! how does the world warp and defile the noblest of natures, since my warm-hearted aunt can have degraded herself by such selfish cruelty!—But farewell! she must not find me here," he continued; "to-morrow night we shall meet in Jermyn-street."

He left me,—and in how changed a state of feeling! Half my griefs seemed removed by the certainty of immediately quitting the roof of the Duchess, and securing free communication with one who was to be henceforward to me all in all. Algernon had even persuaded Lady Carleton to allow me the attendance of Phillis; who was to call for me at an early hour the following morning, and escort me back to town.

Any further interview with the Duchess seemed unnecessary. I heard her throughout that evening rattling and laughing with her foreign guests; while I was occupied in addressing her a few lines, to acquaint her after my departure with my plans, and Algernon's generosity. Next morning, at the appointed hour, Lord Rawborne's carriage appeared at the door: and thus there was nothing ignominious in my *mode* of quitting the house, from which I was virtually expelled.

After a hurried journey, I arrived in Jermyn-street; and was accosted as I had anticipated by Lady Carleton, with—"Well, child, you have found out at last that all is not gold that glitters? However, I have consented to take you back again; and henceforward, Lizzy, I hope we shall understand each other."

I found a note from Algernon, announcing that, at two o'clock the following day, he should bring Mr. Fitzirnham to be presented in form to Lady Carleton. But, alas! my joy at the prospect was damped by a letter, redirected from Brighthelmstone in the interim. Spetchingley, dear venerable Spetchingley, the source of my youthful pride, the cradle of my errors, was advertised *to be let;* and a small house at Aldborough, in Suffolk, to which place my father had been accustomed to repair for occasional sea-bathing, had been hired for a term of years for the family.

"There has been some difficulty," wrote Harry Mordaunt, "in even saving my poor father from arrest,—a public disgrace which, I am convinced, would have been the death-warrant of the poor old man. We may, therefore, consider his life as the gift of the generous friend who came forward to his relief with the sacrifice of his little fortune!"

I trembled to read on. My presentiments already assured me, that this heavy obligation was owing to none other than the kinsman against whom my prejudices were so strong. And I was right. It was Dick Mordaunt, whose pittance of four thousand pounds had been forced on the acceptance of the Squire; to whom, as head of the Mordaunt family, his sense of allegiance was as strong as that of a gallant Highlander to the chief of his clan. And this was the man I had despised as an interested hanger-on at Spetchingley!

"I need not assure you, my dear Lizzy," continued my brother, "that had it been prudent to relieve my father from his difficulties, by any sacrifice of family property on my part, the thing would have been instantly accomplished. But the entail and the law were too strong for us. A small farm, bequeathed me specifically by my grandfather, is put up to sale to satisfy the more pressing creditors: the remainder of the estates are to lie at nurse in the hands of trustees, that the strictest economy may enable my father to lay aside the sum of £15,000, *intended* as a settlement for younger children,

but never secured. Richard will luckily be ordained in a couple of months, and take possession of the fine living of Spetchingley, which has been held for him, and Alfred is safe in the protection of Lord Rawborne; but, under these circumstances, dearest Lizzy, judge how great must be my gratification that I did not peevishly remove you from Rochester House, and the advantages secured by the protection of my aunt. *You*, at least, are spared from witnessing the present humiliations of your family. Heaven grant, my dear girl, that you may form a prudent connexion, such as will enable you at some future time to afford a home to Jane and Helen."

Under such dispiriting auspices was I to present myself to Fitzirnham; deprived of even the poor three thousand pounds I had already announced to him as my fortune; the daughter of a ruined man—a gray-headed man, just rescued from arrest—a man devoting his latter years to privation, in order to create a provision for his numerous family.

How easy is all this to write of now!—but how strange and mysterious a lesson it afforded then to my inexperience, to learn that the brother-in-law of a Lady Lavinia with half a million in possession, and of an Earl with a rent-roll of twenty thousand per annum, could have been on the brink of a gaol, from the trivial improvidence of having for twenty years exceeded his income by about five hundred a-year; and of having spared his pride the mortification of retrenchment, by raising money at high interest, unsuspected by his family!

CHAPTER XVI.

At the period of which I write, there was unquestionably more space in society than now for the expansion of the passions. The excitements of civilized life have since been doubled, and the affairs of public life quadrupled. I recollect the eminent among whom I lived, going down daily to the House, less for the transaction of business, than for the purpose of a brilliant but empty display of oratory, to which the world was at leisure to listen. For, lo! Congreve rockets were not—nor steam-packets—nor rail-roads. The art of war comprehended that of politeness, when the guards of King Louis had time ceremoniously to salute those of King George; family mournings extended our sorrows to a tedious duration, and our loves and courtships were proportionably dilatory.

Were I to assign a characteristic to the present epoch, it should be that of acceleration. The "push-on, keep-moving system" of the buffoon in the farce, is that of all public—all private life. A thing is talked of one day, and done the next, which used to be discussed one year, and attempted the year ensuing. The common places of conversation are cut out; the balsam of life is abolished; hills are levelled, roads shortened, chancery suits curtailed, even whist itself abbreviated; every thing is less tedious than it used to be, saving quarantine and visitation-sermons.

But this increased velocity of action has not been with-

out its influence on our frame of moral feeling. The obligations of social life have lost in importance. People feel sure that a public stigma will be effaced by the multitude of sensations ensuing, as a spot is trodden out by ever-crowding feet; and since even the tie between parents and children has been diminished in force by the hurrying incidents of a more complex frame of society, who can wonder that love itself should be content with ropes of sand, where once its ties consisted in chains of iron! The eight volumes of Sir Charles Grandison are, in 1836, condensed into a Keepsake story; and all the blushes, sighs, tears, sleepless nights, and days of despair, which formed an authorized portion of the young ladyism of my youth, are now as obsolete as hair-powder, furbelows, Ranelagh, Bath, and Hungary water.*

I was not much sillier than my compeers of the court of Queen Charlotte; yet I certainly remember having experienced emotions such as do not disorder the complexions of my grand-nieces; and never more painfully than when I rose to present to Lady Carleton the husband of my choice, in presence of one who loved me far more than according to the common phrase of "to distraction," for he loved me even to the self-command of sacrificing every feeling of his own, in order to secure my happiness.

Lady Carleton received Fitzirnham with a degree of courtesy that convinced me she was imperfectly acquainted with the slenderness of his fortune. To have left me *tête-à-tête* with my lover, was, under any circumstances, a thing contrary to *bienséance;* but Algernon had the charity to engage her in conversation, to afford to his rival the opportunity of the explanation we both so ardently desired.

"You receive me as cordially as ever?" whispered he, on finding them thus. "Your noble spirit is prepared to overlook the dishonouring stigma fixed upon my birth by the Duchess of Rochester?"

"Why should we give ear to the unsupported assertions of a vindictive woman?" said I, hoping to tranquillize his agitation.

"Would I could still withhold my belief!" ejaculated Fitzirnham; "many concurrent circumstances have at

* Hungary water is again the rage among the most refined of the present day.—Editor.

times alarmed my suspicions; but the fact thus openly proclaimed, and from such a quarter, I had no alternative but to address myself peremptorily on the subject to the Duke of Rochester."

"And he replied?"—

"There has been no time for a reply; but my letter has reached him. I have already been at Rochester House this morning—"

"He refuses you an interview?"

"The Duke slept at Penderels, on a visit to Lord Hugh de Vere, and is not expected home till to-morrow. If in his power to render a satisfactory answer, he will probably write."

As simply as I could, I now related to Fitzirnham the family events which would render me a penniless bride.

"I need not assure you," said he, with a melancholy smile, "that this affects me only so far as regards yourself. Would to heaven I were rich enough to render you indifferent to your want of fortune; but, alas! mine amounts only to six hundred a-year; my mother's marriage portion, distinct from the entailed estates of the family of Fitzirnham, and therefore honestly my own."

"Can so limited an income inspire you with courage to burthen yourself with a wife?" said I, with a beating heart;—"an expensive, because, I fear, a useless wife?"

"If Elizabeth Mordaunt has courage to renounce the luxuries of life, and share the attempt!"—was his reply.

"She has," was my unhesitating answer. "Rely upon every effort of my heart and mind to support whatever trials may await us."

"Enough!" cried Fitzirnham, triumph beaming in his eyes. "In spite of the malice of the Duchess—the enmity of the Duke—I pronounce myself the happiest and most enviable of the human kind!"

It was settled between us that, under the disastrous circumstances of my family, he should make no application to my father or brother till after his interview with the Duke of Rochester. But, at that moment, Lady Carleton, rising and coming towards us, broke up the conversation; and as she had unluckily formed an engagement for me to dine with her at Lady Lavinia Shanstone's villa at Petersham, our young visiters were obliged to take leave. Fitzirnham, mean while, wisely consulted her Ladyship's notions of etiquette, by asking permission to

renew his visit on the morrow, which was graciously accorded.

After their departure, I entreated to be excused from my dinner engagement; pleading the agitation to which I had been exposed, as a reason for requiring rest and tranquillity.

"In my time, Miss Mordaunt," replied Lady Carleton, in a most positive tone of negation, "young ladies were less free in admitting their proneness to tender emotions. You must, however, relieve me from the responsibility of leaving you alone in Jermyn-street, where I have had vexatious experience of your aptitude to receive visiters during my absence."

The visit was clearly inevitable. Lady Lavinia's carriage was sent for us; and, as we drove down to Petersham at the leisurely pace of a "serious" dowager's sober coachman and steady long-tailed horses, Lady Carleton found ample time for ill-natured hits, such as she had promised Algernon I should be spared. "She was not surprised," she said, "at my distaste for the dull respectability of such people as the Shanstones. After society so fashionable as that to which I was now accustomed, humdrum aunts had very little chance of pleasing me."

Alas! poor woman, little did she imagine how small my cause of predilection for fashionable society! Not, I admit, that I saw much inducement for preferring the narrow bigotry of such a circle as that of poor Lady Lavinia; whose feebleness of mind rendered her a ready dupe to designing persons, such as in all countries are found to assume the mask of religion as the most imposing garb under which to prey upon the wealthy and prosperous.

It is the custom to apply the epithet "priest-ridden" solely to Papists; while "methodist-parson-ridden," might surely be as fairly affixed to certain evangelical *coteries*,—not followers of the gospel, but followers of the preachers thereof.

Our Petersham party consisted of Mr. Bumptext, Lady Lavinia's patron Whitfieldian saint,* and Mrs. B. his saintess; Miss Glumm, a middle-aged spinster, half-toady

* It does not seem that the spirit of this work is anti-religious; but it appears to me, that whenever any word of sacred import is made use of, in a contrary sense from its legitimate meaning, it is better to express distinctly that it is so perverted, in contempt of *hypocrisy*—but not in disrespect to its true sense, or with any levity of purpose.—EDITOR.

half-housekeeper, kept to hunt for my aunt's mislaid spectacle-case, and see her daughters and tea-chest locked up; with a Mr. and Mrs. Quiesbury, a "serious" couple of croakers from the neighbourhood. The saint and saintess, by the way, who sat side by side at table, might have aptly configured the first decimal,—Bumptext being tall, sharp-set, and thin as number I,—his lady round as an O; while the serious neighbours seemed to have acquired the run of the house, in the character of a permanent amen to the discourses of St. Bumptext; the lady keeping up an admiring vibration of the head, and the gentleman raising his hands and eyes unceasingly to Heaven at the close of every sentence.

"My sister, Lady Carleton, a lady unhappily not yet of the elect," said Lady Lavinia, presenting the Viscountess to the circle.

"And the young creature who bears her company?" coolly inquired Bumptext; for the delicacies of life are invariably laid aside by saintissime saints.

"A deserter from the tents of Belial!" ejaculated Lady Lavinia; "on whom the light has not yet been permitted to shine!"

"Poor misguided young thing!" groaned the lady with the vibrating head. "Her time is still to come!"

"Heaven send it her in due season!" added Mr. Quiesbury, turning up his eyes, but not without a preparatory glance at the luckless daughter of perdition.

Unaccustomed to the jargon of these people, I confess that their familiar adaptation of scriptural language appeared to me little short of blasphemy; nor could I help admiring by what copious replenishments of Sir Obadiah's old East India Madeira, Mr. Bumptext repaid himself for the grace in many sections, wherein he had diffused the simple thanksgiving before meat, spoken IN TWO WORDS by every other Christian. There was little self-denial mingled with their Pharisaicality: they swallowed their venison, and all the scandals and calumnies of the neighbourhood, with equal energy of appetite.

"May I inquire whether your ladyship attended the 'Conversion of the Kamschatkans' Meeting on Thursday, at Shoemakers' Hall?" inquired Mr. Quiesbury, mixing three sorts of fish sauce with his masked lobster.

"I did, sir, and Mr. Wringthemout favoured us with a discourse of a most edifying nature," replied Lady Lavinia.

"Who?"—ejaculated Bumptext, with his mouth full of turkey, and smeared with bread sauce.

"Mr. Wringthemout, my dear sir, a preacher who has acquired great fame."

"By giving up a fine living, just as he was on the point of being stript of his gown by the Bishop of his diocese! Your ladyship attended a meeting called by a teacher so unorthodox!—a Semi-Pelagian,—a"——

"I was so tormented by Lady Spintext and Lady Maunder to put down my name to the subscription," faltered Lady Lavinia, ashamed of herself.

"You put down your name to a subscription headed by Wringthemout—a job—a palpable job! while so many of my own congregation,—the flock to which I am proud to say your Ladyship avowedly belongs, are in want and neediness—fainting, as I may say, by the way-side, for want of the common necessities of life! (Miss Lavinia, may I trouble you for a spoonful or two of Noyeau jelly?) Madam—madam! I had hoped better things!"

Mr. Q. moved his hands, and Mrs. Q. her head; but the lady-housekeeper, apprehensive perhaps that this reproach might be supposed to be addressed to her jelly, ventured to remonstrate with—"But, my good Mr. Bumptext, these poor deluded heathens are crying aloud for crumbs of comfort. A hundred and forty-seven of the most obdurate cases of Kamschatkans are reported to the Society as having been converted by the zeal of its Missionaries, since the meeting of last year; and, as poor dear Mr. Wringthemout admirably observed in his affecting discourse, 'There is more joy in Heaven over one Kamschatkan that recanteth'"——

"Stilton or Cheshire, ma'am?" inquired the old butler, interrupting her.

"I am one of the Committee for the Association for converting the Cochin Chinese," cried Bumptext, stuffing his mouth with trusses of salad with his cheese, as if filling a hay cart; "and I preach for the Congo and Hottentot Missionaries at the Ebenezer in the Borough, next month. Though *I* have no Ladies Spintext and Maunder to canvass for me, I trust your ladyship and daughters will honour me with your attendance and subscription. For, as I say to your opulent neighbour Sir Scrip Lombard, it is easier for a rich man to go through the eye of

a needle than for a camel to enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Mrs. Q. waved her head applaudingly, and Mr. Q his hands; while Bumptext refreshed his offuscated faculties by a tumbler of strong Burton ale.

"Did you do any thing for the fancy sale, Miss, for the benefit of the Baffin's Bay Tract Society?" inquired Mrs. Bumptext of my elder cousin.

"Only a few dozen pen-wipers," replied Miss Lavinia. "We had bestowed our pincushions on the sale in aid of a silver coffee-pot to worthy Doctor Humdrum on his retirement from his chapel; and my mother, with the assistance of Miss Glumm, is flowering an apron for the Auxiliary Autumn Sale for the Whitefield Burying Charity."

"Did Humdrum dispose of his chapel to advantage?" inquired Mr. Q. of Mr. B.

"To the tune of twelve hundred pounds, which, considering how much the offerings have diminished since the death of poor old doting Simpkins, (the rich pinmaker from Snow hill, the trump of his congregation,) was not so bad. Wynter! another glass of the old ale; and, with your ladyship's leave, I will return thanks."

Such was the ill-inspired tenor of discourse among the sober guests of my serious aunt. After dinner, I was released from durance, and permitted to accompany my tall cousins round the grounds, like a prisoner marched between grenadiers; but a dew having risen, Miss Shanstone, who was suffering from a cold, returned to the house; and I found myself for the first time *tête-à-tête* with my cousin Clara.

"I am delighted she is gone," cried Clara, taking my arm under her's, the moment her sister was out of sight. —"I have a thousand things to say to you, and a thousand questions to ask. Algernon Rawborne has often told me you are the very person to be my friend."

"With a sister of your own age, can you want a friend?" said I, startled by her strange frankness.

"You know how strictly we are brought up; how estranged from all the pleasures enjoyed by other young people. Lavy, whose blood flows less freely in her

* If this is intended for a quotation, it should stand thus:—"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."—EDITOR.

veins than mine, is content with all this; and would sit contentedly stitching in the parlour here, with my mother and Miss Glumm, from year's end to year's end. She is shocked when I own to her that our glimpses of aunt Rochester's finery, and our reports of Miss Mordaunt's conquests, fill my heart with envy. In short, Lavy is too good; and I dare not tell her half I feel or fancy. Of *you* I am less afraid."

"You do not think *me* too good?"

"Too good-natured, perhaps, or I should not rattle on so strangely. Tell me, then, dear cousin Lizzy, what is your opinion of Lord Medway?"

"You have known him longer than I have," I replied evasively, recollecting Lady Carleton's frequent assertions, that Lady Lavinia was desirous of making him her son-in-law.

"Longer, but, I suspect, not half so well. I see him only here, where for his own purposes he is playing a part; *you* meet him among those whom he has no motive for deceiving."

"But why are you thus desirous of studying his character?" I inquired.

"That I may understand the surest mode of disgusting him," replied Clara, with perfect openness. "Shall I begin at the beginning, and tell you my little story?—Yes?—You are to know, then, that Lavy and I are heiresses (but at mamma's discretion) to six hundred thousand pounds—Co-heiresses justice would make us; but my mother has so strong an ambition to see one or other of us, (what the prejudices of her childhood induce her to consider the finest thing in Europe next to Queen of Great Britain,) Countess of Rawborne, that I have reason to believe she has offered our right honourable cousin—Medway—a bribe of half a million to induce him to overlook our other deficiencies, and accept one of us as a wife. Lavinia, as the eldest daughter, has certainly the best title to the man and his title; but, unluckily, he has declared in favour of Miss Clara!"

"I wish you joy!"

"Thank you! In case of such a marriage, I am sure I should want it. But, between ourselves, poor dear mamma is a bad calculator; for she might have a lord a-piece for her girls for the same money; whereas, by insisting on this specific earldom, she will be obliged to put up with a

country clergyman for the Cinderella of the family; which clergyman (begging my dear cousin Lizzy's pardon for the liberty) is no other than her brother Richard!"

"My brother Richard engaged to your sister?"—I exclaimed.

"Not absolutely engaged; but I am convinced he is waiting only to ascertain to which of us Medway's handkerchief is irrevocably thrown, before he puts in his claim to the discarded one. For Mr. Mordaunt is modest; he does not raise his pretensions above the level of the sister disinherited of all but a hundred thousand pounds; and *her* my mother would feel justified in bestowing upon so decorous a nephew."

"You mean that you are both required to wait the decision of these gentlemen,——then quietly become their wives?"

"Lavinia, whose life is a system of passive obedience, will I doubt not resign herself to my mother's will; for *my* part, heiress, co-heiress, or no-heirness, I intend to marry neither one nor the other. Algernon Rawborne I could have loved, Algernon I would have married. But, soon after your arrival in town, I luckily discovered his attachment to his handsome cousin Lizzy—cried a few girlish tears—uttered a few girlish ejaculations against the hard fate that kept me at home in my bib and tucker, copying family *recipes*, while Lizzy Mordaunt in pearls and brocade, was figuring at St. James's."

"Ah! Clara! such figuring ends in pain and bitterness! —Trust me, you have little to regret."

"I am beginning to fancy so. At all events, I had not the heroism to break my heart after Algernon. His friendship and good opinion I prize more highly than ever—"

"And with justice; for there lives not a nobler creature."

"But he has no share in my determination to become neither Viscountess Medway nor Mrs. Richard Mordaunt. And now that I am at the end of my confidences, I return to the spot I started from. Tell me, dear coz, in which mode I am most likely to frighten away Lord Medway?"

"Affect expensive tastes and habits, and a *whole* million would not bribe him to your feet. Lord Medway is an able calculator. Every thing to him is a matter of odds—of book and bet. If he thought you likely to spend

more than you would bring, his arithmetic would reply, take thirty thousand a-year from twenty-five thousand, I cannot; ergo, I cannot marry Miss Clara Shanstone."

"The experiment is worth trying," observed my gay-hearted companion. "Medway will be here soon. At this season, we see him constantly. When the hunting is over and there is nothing going on at Newmarket, he takes up his filial position in St. James's-square; and fancies himself devoting his time to poor Lord Rawborne, by passing his mornings at the Clubs and his evenings here. He is fond of boating, and our house is as good a half-way house as any other. Such is the ardent mode of the young gentleman's courtship."

"He is said to have lost several thousand pounds at Epsom to the Prince of Wales," said I.

"I guessed as much," replied Clara; "for within the last two months his assiduities have redoubled. But I see lights in the drawing-room, I fear we must return; thank you a thousand times for your advice, and let me hope that some future occasion will present itself to confirm our friendship."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE tide not serving for his return to town, Lord Medway deigned to accompany us by land; and, with my previous knowledge of Clara's intentions, I was not a little edified to hear him pishing and pshawing at the knavery and tartuffism of the "serious" world we had left at Petersham.

"That fellow Bumptext," said he, "is little better than a thief who plunders in the name of the Lord. He and his tribe batten on the venison and pine-apple of the rich dowagers their dupes; if you observe, the tents of Israel are infallibly pitched in the pleasant places, hard by the running waters."

"It is perhaps as well that Lady Lavinia's, or rather, Sir Obadiah's money, should go to charitable institutions, as to Brag or Pharaoh," said I; perceiving that, thanks to the old Medeira, Lady Carleton was already dozing in her corner of the carriage.

"Why, you are as absurd as that silly girl, Clara Shanstone!" cried Lord Medway, "who accidentally admitted to me to-night, that her mother spends five thousand a-year in charity; and that should her own fortune fall to her control, she intends to double the distribution."

"Excellent girl!"

"Commend me, forsooth, to the restless imbecility of these missionary-meeting——slave-abolishing——Jew-converting ladies. If a wife is prodigal of her husband's money in diamonds and equipages, there is at least something to show for it, and she does one credit in the eyes

of the world; but a ninny who ruins her family to maintain a legion of greasy-haired puritans, preaching their sluggish way through life, as the easiest mode of getting at its loaves and fishes, eats like a locust into one's substance, to no purpose."

"Mr. Bumptext seems of infinite use to Lady Lavinia. He had great influence, too, with Sir Obadiah, and has a right to profit by the will he is supposed to have dictated."

"Ay, ay,—and he would no doubt be equally busy with the marriage-settlements of the girls. Not but that to me, as you must have seen, he is all obsequiousness. It would suit him to have a countess's carriage seen at the door of his conventicle. But no pious prodigality for me!"

Clara's confidings had already received ample confirmation in the minuteness with which Lady Lavinia, having taken me aside in the course of the evening, inquired the value of the Spetchingley living,—the nature of the parish—the condition of the parsonage. I saw she was determined that no portion of her property should go out of the family; and that Miss Lavinia was as much fore-doomed to become Mrs. Richard Mordaunt, as Clara, Lady Medway. Devoid of compunctious visitings on the young lady's account, I was pleased to find my worldly-wise brother's prospects improve according to the wisdom of the world. A few days afterwards, I received a letter from him, entreating me not to let the state of my father's affairs transpire among the Shanstones. As if it were for me to busy myself with proclaiming the downfal of Mordaunt of Spetchingley!

The anxious night mean while wearied away;—the anxious morning arrived;—nay, the very hour appointed by Fitzirnham for his visit, came and passed, but no tidings of our expected guest!—Algernon had apprized me the preceding day that he was on the eve of leaving town for a week, on business for his father; but the day expired without intelligence of the man whose business and pleasure ought to lie exclusively in Jermyn-street. Towards evening, my aunt grew jocose concerning "the desertion of my swain;" but so perfect was my confidence that nothing but illness would detain Fitzirnham at such a time, that I would have sent a note of inquiry to his lodgings, could I have done so without exciting the

pleasantries of Lady Carleton. I retired to rest, satisfied that early next morning some explanation would reach me from his hands.

Next morning brought, however, only the letter from Richard to which I have alluded; and the monotonous business of the day proceeded without interruption in Jermyn-street, rendered doubly disagreeable by the oppressiveness of London summer weather. Never had time appeared so tedious! I had no watch—to Lady Carleton I dared not apply for the hour; and I sat, counting the chimes of St. James's, and the minutes between, till my head seemed distracted with confusion. The newspaper arrived—what cared I for the newspaper!—Yet my aunt, leisurely putting on her spectacles, began to rehearse aloud an account of a riot in Dublin, in which a respectable shopkeeper had been tarred and feathered, interrupting herself every moment to ejaculate, "What a terrible thing for the poor dear Duchess of Rutland!"

She was still reading the paper, when a message card was brought in, and, all impatient to learn its contents, I could not forgive the deliberation with which Lady Carleton proceeded to maunder over the wounds of Sheriff Kirkpatrick and the violence of the Dublin mob, while I sat trembling with agitation. At length, after completing her newspaper, she read aloud—

"Lady Algernon Percy's compliments to Lady Carleton, and begs to offer condolence to her Ladyship and Miss Mordaunt, on the sad event in their family."

The card dropped from her hands as she looked inquiringly into my face. What could this mean? Lady Algernon's servant was interrogated, and could reply only that he had been desired to deliver the message and wait for an answer.

"Rely upon it, all is over with my poor brother!" cried Lady Carleton. "But how strange that Medway did not send for me, and that others should hear it sooner than myself!—I will set off instantly to St. James's Square."

I suggested that her footman would bring back intelligence before she could be half-way there. The intelligence came; that "Lord Medway had been out all day—that Mr. Rawborne was in the country."

"And my brother—my brother!"

"The Earl has passed a good night, my lady, and is much as usual."

Fresh perplexity, but, alas! new apprehensions: my name being especially included in Lady Algernon's inquiry, I began to fear that my own branch of the family must be the source of sympathy. My poor father might have sunk under the pressure of his misfortunes.

"This is the strangest circumstance," exclaimed Lady Carleton. "Here we are with the certainty that some calamity has occurred among those nearest and dearest to us, but without means of clearing up our doubts!"

On despatching a messenger to Lady Algernon's, we had the mortification of learning that she had driven down to dine at Sion House. But, while mutually engaged in conjecture and alarm, a newsman's horn suddenly interrupted our colloquy,—and in the uproar of a vociferous announcement that followed, we could distinguish the name of the Duke of Rochester. I had scarcely courage to ring the bell and desire the servant to buy an evening paper;—still less, to read on, when I saw the first column headed with "MELANCHOLY SUICIDE OF HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF ROCHESTER!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Duke of Rochester,—the virtuous, the pious, benevolent Duke of Rochester, a self-murderer! The father of those helpless girls,—the husband of ———. I dared not reflect upon it! Fitzirnham's absence—the interview between them,—a thousand frightful surmises already distracted my mind!

"Most inexplicable!" ejaculated Lady Carleton, who had been calmly perusing the statement in the newspaper.

I raised my pale face inquiringly towards her——

"That no one should have considered it necessary to communicate these melancholy facts to one so nearly connected with the poor dear Duke as myself!—I can understand that, in my brother's state of health, they might consider it right to withhold the intelligence from *him;* but I, whose presence of mind might have been so useful had they thought proper to send for me!"

"But the Duchess, Madam?" I at length was able to falter.

"According to the account in this paper, Medway left town express for Brighton at about eleven this morning, soon after the discovery took place. The poor dear Duke, *it* seems, committed the rash act in the course of the night. He was always a late riser. But his bell not ringing as usual this morning, the servants broke open the door of his room, to find him lifeless, weltering in his blood,—shot through the heart with a duelling pistol."

"And is no motive assigned?" said I.

"Read it yourself," replied Lady Carleton, placing the paper in my hand. But I could not read. My sight was indistinct with horror, and the paper, escaping my hands, fell upon the floor.

"It would be, perhaps, but proper," said Lady Carleton, after a pause, "if I were to go to Rochester House, and see what assistance I can render?—Lord Hugh is so miserable an invalid—the Duchess absent—the poor children—yes! put on your hat, my dear, and let a coach be called. It will be the shortest way. I will set out immediately."

"Indeed, madam, you must excuse me," said I. "I am completely overcome, and should be quite useless,—quite an incumbrance in such a scene."

"This is no time for fine feelings, Miss Mordaunt," cried my aunt. "The obligations you owe the poor dear Duke and Duchess, make it incumbent on you to exert yourself at such a moment. I am under the necessity of requiring you to accompany me."

But, at the mere menace of such a visit, a flood of hysterical tears came to my relief; leaving me in so complete a state of exhaustion, that even Lady Carleton was compelled to admit the necessity of my lying down, while she proceeded to Rochester House. My aunt was, however, sufficiently herself to issue orders before she quitted home, that the servants should undertake no message or letter for me during her absence; and, on my applying to Phillis to convey a note to Fitzirnham, I was peremptorily refused.

It was almost evening when Lady Carleton departed,—it was more than midnight when she returned; and who can express what those intervening hours were to me!—Such cruel incidents had lately crowded into my young existence, that I began to expect every moment would bring forth some new horror. My nerves were seriously affected; I trembled at a sound; every trifling incident seemed fraught with evil portents!

At length, after a period that appeared endless, I heard the step of Lady Carleton ascending the stairs; and the awful nature of the scene she had been witnessing needed no stronger demonstration than the sudden change of her demeanour. She, usually so selfish, so trivial, seemed to have acquired sense and feeling in the dread presence of death!

"Is the Duchess arrived in town?" was my first inquiry.

"No, my dear. Lord Medway is just returned; but my sister was in such a state that he did not think it prudent to move her; particularly to Rochester House, where so much that is afflicting awaits her."

"Has any thing transpired concerning the motives of the act?" said I, taking Lady Carleton's hand, as if to entreat her to deal mercifully with me in the disclosure.

"The inquest will not take place till to-morrow at daybreak. The coroner was engaged elsewhere, in an important case involving a charge of murder."

"Did the Duke leave no paper—no letter?"

"That part of the affair is still involved in mystery. One servant declares, that on entering the room and discovering the body, he saw a letter lying on the table, which in the confusion seems to have disappeared; for the Duke's confidential valet, who followed the man on his giving the alarm, protests that no letter was there. Lord Hugh—for I cannot yet learn to call him the Duke—has cross-examined these people minutely;—ill and broken-hearted as he is, nothing can exceed the good sense of all his proceedings. He rose from a sick-bed to attend the summons to town; he, whom we have always considered in the family a discontented, ailing, hypochondriac, turns out to be a man of stronger mind than his brother, and with a heart equally humane."

"And does he form no conclusion respecting the excitement that must have led to this deep offence?"

"He will express no opinion till the issue of the inquest. It seems that the Duke, who passed the preceding day with him at Penderels, was in a state of deep despondency. He arrived in town yesterday morning, was seen at Brookes's, where nothing unusual was remarked in his deportment; yet, previous to this, he is stated to have had a long interview in his library with Mr. Fitzirnham, in the course of which their voices ran so high as to reach the servants in the hall."

"It is, then, as I feared!"

"The duke dressed for dinner, dined with Lord John Cavendish, was observed to be dull and absent; and when the rest of the party adjourned to Carleton House in the evening, excused himself on the score of indisposition, and returned home."

"Alone?"

"His own carriage not being in waiting, Lord St. Asaph set him down. On arriving at home, several notes, cards, and letters were given him by his own man; all of which have been found, with the exception of one,—a letter brought by a servant in a plain livery, which it is supposed he must have destroyed."

"Is it conjectured that this letter came from Mr. Fitzirnham?"

"The person who received it did not recognise the servant."

"The Duke was not seen afterwards?"

"Only by his valet-de-chambre. He desired the man not to sit up, as he had letters to write, and did not require attendance. The servants went quietly to bed. The Duke, you know, slept in the body of the house, so that no detonation was heard in the offices. Not the slightest suspicion, in short, was excited till this morning, when the body was discovered exactly according to the statement you saw in the newspapers. The medical men called in have decided, from appearances, that he must have committed the rash act at about two o'clock in the morning."

"What tortures of mind must he have undergone in the interim!" said I, unguardedly.

"What reason is there for attributing to him tortures of mind?" said my aunt, sharply.

"The fatal catastrophe that has taken place," I replied, more cautiously, "surely affords proof that he had something on his mind?"

"Insanity—aberration of intellect," answered Lady Carleton, in the tone of a person who has formed an unalterable opinion.

"Is there derangement in the De Vere family?"

"No matter whether there is or not. Insanity is often known to pass over a generation, and re-appear. No doubt some ancestor of the Duke's was afflicted, of whom we have never happened to hear. At all events, my dear Lizzy," continued my aunt, lowering her voice, "such is the opinion I advise you to express, if interrogated on the subject. It is the cue of the Rawborne family to disclaim their belief that the poor dear Duke was disordered in his mind. Above all, be very cautious how you commit yourself by the slightest allusion to the subject. People will be on the watch to catch up every syllable that falls from *us*."

"No syllable could ever fall from my lips injurious to the Duke of Rochester," said I, mournfully."

"But the Duchess!" significantly demanded my aunt. "Already, child, the newspapers are at work. I need not remind you how dearly, in these times, they delight in every thing attributing misconduct to the nobility! Old Muffle the apothecary, who dropped in at Rochester House, on pretence of visiting a sick housemaid, but in reality to find out all that was going on, for the amusement of his patients to-morrow, whispered to me that there was an attack upon the Duchess and Lord Pembury in a government evening paper, charging them in express terms with the death of the poor dear Duke, and ending with a furious attack upon the society and satellites of the Prince of Wales."

"Every thing in England is made a matter of politics!" said I, scarce knowing what to answer.

"Any imputation upon the Duchess at such a time, might be productive of serious results."

"She will surely not be in a state of mind to read a newspaper?"

"I did not refer to her feelings, but to her fortunes —The will cannot be opened till after the inquest; as in case of a verdict of *felo de se*, (a thing, however, unprecedented in the Duke's rank of life,—such things are never brought in suicide, except for one of the lowest rabble by way of example,) it would become inoperative; and, *till* the will is opened, it is impossible to say how far my poor dear sister may have been left dependent on the present Duke. Her settlements, you know, were made without contemplating Lord John's accession to the title; and she may possibly have to content herself with the jointure of a younger brother's wife. No woman can better sympathize than I, in the misery of having a rank in life to support out of a beggarly jointure! No wonder the poor Duchess has been so anxious for a son! As mother of the heir, she would have been executrix, guardian, trustee, or something of that sort, and taken care of herself. I fear she has little to expect from the present Duke."

"He is said to be a just and conscientious man."

"And is it your candid opinion, Lizzy, that the Duchess would profit on this occasion by having justice dealt her?"

Not daring to reply, I evaded the question by en-

treating my aunt's permission to address a note of inquiry to Fitzirnham.

"Certainly not at present," she replied. "Mr. Fitzirnham will have to appear as a witness on the inquest; and I must see Medway or Algernon, before I decide what line of conduct we are for the future to observe towards that young man."

Such were my incentives to sleep!—Yet overpowered by a long continuance of disquietude, I *did* fall into a state of unnatural torpor.—I had even some difficulty in rousing myself from its oppression to listen to Lady Carleton, when she arrived at my bed-side the following morning, with half a dozen newspapers, forwarded by the officiousness of old Muffle, each containing a totally different version of the catastrophe at Rochester House.

"And thus,"—observed one of the Whig oracles, after a tolerably correct recapitulation of particulars, "the country is deprived of an upright and intelligent legislator, at a period when, alas! such characters are becoming daily more rare, and at a crisis when they are becoming daily more valuable. The Duke of Rochester was a nobleman of the most liberal views and opinions, an influential adviser of the Prince of Wales; nay, he may perhaps be regarded as the key-stone of that splendid arch, connecting the aristocracy of the country with the community of sages, philosophers, and sects, now labouring for its advancement in the history of nations. To such a man, we cannot bid adieu without a two-fold sorrow; first, that we should have lost such a coadjutor in our efforts in the good cause,—and secondly, that a man of such high intelligence should have suffered his mind to be overpowered by the gloom pervading at the present moment the prospects of public life. Unable to repress the disgust of life produced by the hideous attempt of the Tories to invade the constitution, and involve this unhappy island once more in anarchy and confusion, the excellent and honourable Duke of Rochester put an end to his days!"

"We approach the death of the Duke of Rochester," —held forth, on the other hand, the Tory print,—"with becoming feelings of sympathy in the affliction of an honourable family, suffering under so melancholy a bereavement. Nevertheless, we should but ill discharge our duty, did we not congratulate the country upon the extinction of one of those dangerous torches which, on pretence of enlightening a certain misguided class of people,

have long been spreading incendiarism and conflagration throughout Great Britain. The Duke of Rochester was, in short, a member of that revolutionary association,—the nest of baleful scorpions engendered by the genial atmosphere of Carlton House. We do not expressly accuse the deceased nobleman of having wilfully widened the breach between the most illustrious parents of these realms, and their rebellious heir apparent; but we *do* assert that his Grace has been constantly found in the group of Falstaffs, Poinses, and Pistols, misleading and disgracing the Harry Monmouth of our times. He is gone to his account, and peace be with his manes! But, we admonish the survivors of this wanton crew, that a day of reckoning is at hand; and that though one among them, on discerning the position of his party rendered hopeless through the triumphant stability of the present glorious administration, was unable to bear up against the oppression of mortification and remorse, *they* have years in store, to signalize by the recantation of their errors, and the disavowal of a political creed, the infamy of which has recently demonstrated itself even to the most unobservant of mankind."

By wordy plausibility such as this, how unfailingly is the world deceived; while those newspapers which boldly arraigned the proceedings of the Duchess and Lord Pembury, and designated the suicide of his Grace as a social murder, were reviled on all sides as barbarians, scandalous libellers, and actionable. The latter word was perhaps not without its effect, or the gold of Lord Pembury was made to gild over his sins; for, on the morrow, the same papers announced the Duchess as "unsunned snow," —his lordship, as "this amiable and injured individual;" and the death of the Duke of Rochester, as "a domestic calamity involved in the deepest mystery!"

CHAPTER XIX.

EARLY in the day succeeding our first intimation of the dreadful event, Algernon, who had been summoned to town, arrived suddenly in Jermyn-street.

"My dear Lizzy!" said he, taking me aside, "have you the least idea what has become of Fitzirnham?"

"Not the slightest. I have seen and heard nothing of him since you left us."

"How unfortunate! The examination at Rochester House is taking a most unexpected turn; and, unless we can procure his attendance by to-morrow, the most injurious suspicions will be excited."

"Against *him?* Impossible!"

"Although to you and me, my dear cousin, who are acquainted with the antecedents, nothing can appear so little unaccountable, I was about to say so natural, as the death of our lamented friend, the jury, whose business it is to view every case with suspicion, have so severely cross-examined the servants concerning Mr. Fitzirnham's causes of provocation,—his mode of quitting the house,—and the possibility of any person having entered the court-yard unobserved, and secreted himself in the Duke's apartments, that on the publication of the proceedings in to-morrow's paper, a strong implication of suspicion of murder will go forth to the public."

"Of *murder?*—and against Fitzirnham!"—cried I,—gasping for breath.

"All would be cleared up by his appearance in court," replied Algernon. "If, indeed, he left town, as it is

stated, immediately after his interview with the Duke, he may not yet be aware of the sad catastrophe, and consequently have no motive for return. Could you give me the slightest indication of his movements, I would instantly set off and follow him till I brought him back; if within distance, I might perhaps be yet in time."

"I have, alas! no information to give. Have you applied to his friends the Sheridans,—to the Pemburys—to"——

"Well suggested!" cried Algernon. "I felt so sure that *you* would be *au fait* to his haunts, that I gave no thought to any other person. Dick Sheridan will be certain to know,—I will go to him directly."

And away he flew, in spite of all Lady Carleton's questions, and efforts to detain him.

Thus forewarned by my cousin's kindness, the proceedings of the inquest, as detailed in the papers, gave no shock to my feelings. As is usual in such cases, the persons last in communication with the deceased, consisting in this instance of his upper-servants, were closely examined. The reports flying in various directions were apparently known to the jury; for one of the jurymen—a stanch Pittite tradesman of the neighbourhood—was most unsilenceable in his questions to the *valet-de-chambre* as to "his Grace's state of feeling towards the Duchess.—why he was not with her at Brighton,—and whether the Mr. Fitzirnham to whom allusion had been made, was any relative of the Pembury family?"

The man was not aware that any such relationship existed.

"Was he young and handsome?"

"He was."

"A frequent visiter at Rochester House?"

"Very frequent."

"A friend of the Duke, or of her Grace?"

"Chiefly of the Duke, whom he often accompanied home from Brookes's or the House of Lords."—

"You say," persisted the pertinacious juryman, "that in the interview between the deceased nobleman and this young gentleman, the dispute ran so high, that their voices reached the hall. Did the subject of their conference transpire in consequence?"

The Coroner objected to this question as irregular.

"When Mr. Fitzirnham quitted the house, who opened the door and let him out?"

A butler and footman presented themselves to the jury, as having answered a loud ring in the library, and found the Duke and his guest in a state of excitement.

The Duke's last words, as they appeared, were—"Let me hear no more of it. Good morning." They could not say to what those words bore reference, but received the summons as an order to escort Mr. Fitzirnham to the hall, which they did.

"You *saw* him, then, quit the house?"

"No. It was the business of the livery-porter to open the hall-door."

The porter being summoned, stated that he *had* opened the door for Mr. Fitzirnham; that he saw him get into a carriage waiting in the court-yard, and drive through the great gates. He was certain that he had not opened the hall-door afterwards for the young gentleman in the course of the day. He was certain that no other person had opened it, and that it was impossible for any one to penetrate into the house, through the hall, without his knowledge. He had not been intoxicated; he had not been asleep in his chair; he would declare upon oath that it was impossible Mr. Fitzirnham could have re-entered the house, after dark, through the offices.

"Was it easy to enter the house through the offices?"

He could not say. It formed no part of his duty to preside over the comings and goings of the offices. There was a wicket-gate connected with this department, which, for the safety of the house, was always kept shut.

In the over-elaborate deposition of the medical men, lay the source of all this perplexity. A young surgeon of the neighbourhood, accidentally called in as nearest at hand, who evidently considered it a good opportunity to attract public notice, stated his opinion that the pistol was as likely to have been discharged by a second person as by the Duke's own hand—persisting in calling the attention of the jury to the remoteness of the spot where, on his arrival, he had found the discharged pistol; although it was admitted by half a-dozen servants that each of them had examined and removed the implement of destruction previously to the attendance of the surgeon.

Again, the Duke was not known to have had the pistol in question in his possession, and neither the fellow-pistol, nor powder, nor ball, could be discovered in his apartments. It was admitted that he had two private bureaux, on which seals had been affixed by order of Lord Hugh,

as containing family papers of importance, and one or two of the jury expressed a desire to return to the library, and examine the bureau. But this proposal was overruled by the rest, tradesmen of the family, who knew better than to press the investigation in a mode likely to be offensive to the present Duke. At length, however, the remonstrances of the Tory butterman grew so clamorous, that the proceedings were adjourned till the following day, when Mr. Fitzirnham was subpœnaed to attend.

This unexpected delay was naturally the cause of great confusion in the family. No measures could be taken—no will opened—no obsequies prepared.

"I scarcely know what to do about returning to Rochester House," said Lady Carleton, after having re-read the proceedings of the inquest. "The Duke gave me no invitation and very little encouragement to renew my visit. But, deeply interested as I am in this grievous affair, I feel it is there only I am likely to gain certain intelligence. I want to know whether any thing further has been heard of the Duchess, and what has been done about those sweet girls. The Duke was to go down to Beaufort House to-day. Their father's death, but not his mode of death, was to be formally announced to them; and fortunately they live in such perfect seclusion that no vulgar rumours are likely to reach their ears and excite their suspicions."

"Poor girls! To *them* how irreparable such a loss!"—

"Irreparable indeed,—more especially as they have no brother. After the decease of the present Duke, the title goes to a collateral heir. As Lady Lavinia says, in the letter I received from her this morning, begging me to order her's and the girls mourning, what a blessing if the Duchess should prove *enceinte!*"

Unable sincerely to echo this sentiment, I remained silent.

"I confess," resumed Lady Carleton, "I see no cause for the slightest surmise that the poor dear Duke fell by any other hand than his own; nor for inferring that, because Mr. Fitzirnham and he talked loud together, Mr. Fitzirnham is an assassin. Still, it wears a very awkward appearance for your friend, that he left town so precipitately, and without leaving his address. Between ourselves as we are here, Lizzy, secure from being overheard, I may venture to tell you that thirty years ago, soon after the poor dear Duke returned from the grand

tour, he formed a prodigious intimacy with this young man's family. Fitzirnham, the father, had a beautiful place near Sevenoaks, where he used to receive the eminent public characters and wits of the day—George Selwyn, Walpole, Sir Horace Mann, Conway,—and all that set; and a very lovely wife, who formed perhaps the chief attraction to the society. When Lord H **** went to Ireland, he took his brother-in-law, Fitzirnham, as his secretary, leaving the beauty, (who was not fond of sea-voyages,) alone at his country seat. Soon after this blunder, De Vere Fitzirnham was born; and I remember at the time, which was nearly that of my introduction into society, many people were scrupulous about visiting pretty Mrs. Fitzirnham on account of her intimacy with Lord John De Vere, whom I little expected would, twenty years afterwards, become my brother-in-law; still less, poor man,—but God's will be done!"

"Was the Duchess aware of the connexion between her husband and Mrs. Fitzirnham?"

"At the time it was going on, she must have been an infant in arms, for the lady died soon after the return of her husband from Ireland. Some one, however, must have been at the trouble of giving my sister information on the subject, most likely Lord Pembury; for more than once within the last three months, when I have alluded to Lord John's very natural resentment of the levity of her conduct, she has defended herself by reference to his former *liaison* with Mrs. Fitzirnham."

"You conclude, then, that De Vere is an illegitimate son of the late Duke of Rochester?"

"My dear, I have given over forming conclusions about any thing or any body. He is the *legitimate* son of Mr. Fitzirnham in a legal point of view, for he was unquestionably born in wedlock; and *that* is enough for society to know or inquire."

"But it is not enough for *him*. I can imagine *his* solicitude on such a point!"

"I fancy the less we or any of us busy ourselves with raking up the frailties of our ancestors or ancestresses, the better. The famous Abbé Prevost asserts that not one man in ten arrives at the age of thirty without having done something to merit the gallies. I am of opinion that, in *our* rank of life, not one man in ten is his reputed father's son. We cannot ask too few questions on such points."

"You are reducing the morality of the age and country to a low standard," said I. "May the last knowledge I acquire be that knowledge of the world, which induces mistrust and contempt of my fellow-creatures."

Still, no news of Fitzirnham! The day passed slowly and heavily away. I would have given worlds for a visit from Lord Medway, to acquire some idea of the opinions floating in the world, and the judgments formed by the present Duke of Rochester; yet, not a soul of the family came near us! But in the dusk of the evening, in order to avoid being recognised, Lady Carleton made her way out for purchases of mourning, intending to call in St. James's Square on Lord Rawborne, previous to her return.

Scarcely had she been gone ten minutes, when I heard a sedan chair admitted into the hall; and, rushing to the head of the stairs to warn the servants that I was not in a state to receive visiters, I saw the muffled figure of a lady, mysteriously ushered up by Phillis; and, having retreated into the drawing-room, found myself suddenly accosted by the Duchess of Rochester, who fell, overwhelmed with emotion, upon my neck. Having placed her on the sofa, I could discover, by the imperfect evening light, the wreck her countenance presented. Pale as death, save that her eyelids were of a burning crimson, not a tear was falling, not a muscle in movement; she seemed transfixed with horror.

"I am sorry to say Lady Carleton has just left the house—" I began.

"I have been waiting for her departure," answered the unhappy woman, in a hollow tone of voice. "My business, Lizzy, is with you. You can save me—you can preserve me!"

I had not inhumanity to express what I truly felt, that her ruin was already consummated in the death of her excellent husband.

"Secure Fitzirnham's silence for me," she resumed; "induce him to keep my secret in his examination to-morrow, and I am safe."

"I have little hope that Mr. Fitzirnham will be even forthcoming. Algernon assures me that his absence will expose him to injurious suspicions; yet I have not the means of warning him to come forward."

"Not forthcoming?—Has he not yet reached town?" eagerly inquired the Duchess.

"Three days have elapsed since we met—a thousand

horrors have intervened—he has even incurred the opprobrium of an assassin."

"One word will suffice to exculpate himself and criminate *me*," replied the Duchess. "*He* knows too well that the fatal letter—but of what am I talking! I came hither, Lizzy, only to entreat you to procure me an interview with Fitzirnham."

"Would, Madam, that it were in my power!"

"My fate and the fate of many hangs on his discretion. Should the inquest people persist in knowing the subject of dispute between him and that unhappy man, it would be so easy to assign a political motive—— "

"Be assured," interrupted I, "that worlds would not induce him to assert any thing but the exact truth. The quarrel between them doubtless originated in Fitzirnham's determination to elucidate your declaration, that he was the son of the Duke of Rochester."

"Yes, yes! at their *morning* interview," cried the Duchess impatiently. "It was but natural the young man should exhibit irritation on learning the infamy of his mother, and receiving the Duke's interdiction of his marriage with yourself. But how far he can excuse to his conscience the letter he afterwards wrote, disclosing to my unfortunate husband the truth of that fatal affair at Brighthelmstone, I leave it to you and him to decide."

"But why should you imagine he ever wrote such a letter?" cried I. "What evidence is there that the Duke ever became aware that—— "

"No matter!" interrupted the Duchess. "That he did write it, is known to *me*—known to himself—and should he admit the fact on his examination, I am lost! The world—my family—my own children—will be alike entitled to brand me as infamous, and as the murderess of my husband!"

She uttered these dreadful words with a horror-struck impassibility of demeanour, more awful than the most impassioned vehemence; and so painfully did her deportment impose upon my feelings, that I had not courage to appeal to her conscience against herself.

"I know," pursued the Duchess, finding me silent, "that I am fallen to the lowest pitch of shame—that I am a degraded, miserable being—reduced to supplicate where once I could command. No one can be more humiliated—more wretched—more debased! But I must not shrink from all this. I have still duties to perform;—I cling

to life: Lizzy, I *dare* not die! I have again to become a mother. Should Fitzirnham's depositions tend to inculpate me and this unborn child, I will retire to some lonely retreat, to curse away the remainder of my blighted days; but, should nothing occur in accusation, a few years' retirement will restore me to the charities of the world; and I may yet live to be a protectress to those unoffending girls, who have not yet heard a vilifying word applied to their unhappy mother!"

I listened and trembled at my own responsibility as her *confidante!*

"I cannot weep!" she resumed after a pause.—"My eyes, my heart, are seared as with a burning iron. I can but appeal to you, Lizzy Mordaunt, as the sister of your dead mother. I will not anticipate the results of Fitzirnham's enmity; be it what it may, *you* will have to answer for it,—yes! you and he will deeply, deeply answer for it. One victim has fallen already. Is not that enough to appease you?"

She was in no state of mind to be reasoned with. I could only reply, as I had replied before, that I knew nothing of Fitzirnham's movements, and could therefore exercise no control over his proceedings.

"And you sit there unmoved," cried she, "without attempting to seek him out, and force him to redeem himself from the obloquy that has fallen on him? Tame, spiritless heart!—I, a new-made widow, a suffering, shrinking, stigmatized woman, have come forth from my home at all risks of exposure. The world believe me shut up at Brighthelmstone; and thither, without rest or food, I shall this night return, if so fortunate as to have obtained an interview with Fitzirnham."

"Had I a messenger to despatch to St. James's Square and Rochester House," said I, "I might obtain news of Algernon, and through him of Fitzirnham, of whom he left me to go in search."

"At neither of those places have they received tidings of either of them," answered the Duchess. "I have a confidential agent on the watch."

"And should Fitzirnham be still absent when the jury resumes its investigation to-morrow, what would be the result?"

"To me or to him?"

"To both."

"Who, who can say!" faltered the Duchess. "Who

can calculate upon the turn the opinion of these officious fools may take, excited as they are by the accusations of a party-press, which has no other object in view but to render a paper profitable, at the expense of private deceivers. They may perhaps bring in a verdict of wilful murder by persons unknown. A criminal trial may be the result; though, alas! it is as well known to Fitzirnham, myself, and others, that the Duke died by his own hand, as if we had been spectators of the deed." She started up. A sound on the stairs induced her to fear that Lady Carleton might be returning.

"She must not find me here,—yet, by coming I have effected nothing!" cried the Duchess, pressing her hand to her forehead.

"If you were to go at once to Fitzirnham's residence, and wait for further intelligence!"

"His lodgings are closely watched by the police," she replied. "I should be recognised by these people, who are accustomed to see me at public places; and judge what conclusions might be drawn, were it known that the widowed Duchess of Rochester,—widowed, alas! by such means,—had paid a furtive visit to a man lying under suspicion as his murderer? No! Lizzy, I must back to Brighthelmstone, to support once more the horrors of suspense. Will you not comfort me before I go, by the assurance that should Fitzirnham return, you will intercede with him in my favour?"

"Fitzirnham, Madam, is henceforth as my husband; his safety, my first object; his renown, my glory," said I. "All, however, that *can* be said or done consistently with honour in your defence, rely upon my persuasions to effect."

"Thanks, thanks!—And now, Lizzy Mordaunt, one word more. You must go down to-morrow to Beaufort Lodge—You must see those girls, and comfort them more tenderly than they will be comforted by hirelings. I dread lest old nurse Feltham, who loves them, and venerated the Duke as much as she despises *me*, should let fall some words in their presence calculated to enlighten them. It will be long, very long, before I gain courage to see them again. Will you go down to them, Lizzy?"

"Alas! madam, you well know how little I am mistress of my own movements," said I; "and labouring, as I latterly did, under the ill opinion of the Duke, I hardly

know in what light he may have represented me to his brother or to his daughters."

"Objections,—always objections against obliging me!" exclaimed the Duchess, petulantly drawing down her veil. "But, fallen as I am, I must no longer hope for friends. Farewell, Lizzy,—farewell, my sister's daughter.—We may never meet again in this world."

"Heaven support you, my poor dear aunt," said I,—overcome by the sight of her humiliation.—"Address yourself to the Almighty for comfort and counsel—for vain is the help of man, in affliction such as ours."

She withdrew,—I heard her enter the chair; and ere she could have reached the end of the street, the shrill voice of Lady Carleton was scolding once more in the hall.

CHAPTER XX.

STILL, not a word of intelligence! Neither Algernon nor Fitzirnham had been heard of. The adjourned inquest was to resume its investigation at noon the following day: and all remained in disorder at Rochester House. Lady Carleton having made up her mind to pass the morrow at Petersham, for the discussion of these family afflictions, retired at an early hour to rest; and all that night I passed in bitter tears—in agonizing terrors.

At length morning dawned, and with morning hope,—hope that flies the darkness of the night. Yet, unequal as I was to support the presence of new sorrow, a letter of inquiry and condolence from my brother Henry arrived to aggravate my distress;—for, though he wrote ostensibly to express his sympathy in the fate of the Duke of Rochester, it was the fate of our father to which his letter adverted with a more profound sense of commiseration!

"We have been settled this fortnight past at Aldborough," said he; "and I can scarcely describe to you, my dear Lizzy, the miserable effect produced on the gentlemanly-minded old man, by this compulsory cession of his habits and pleasures. His hair, which you remember gray, is now white as snow; and his fine upright figure

has become suddenly bowed by the ravages of time. My father scarcely raises his eyes from the ground,—he does not eat,—he does not sleep. Much of this I attribute to the want of his usual exercise. Accustomed for so many years to pass many hours a day on horseback, he feels the loss of these bracing habits. That excellent creature Dick Mordaunt, who has quitted his own comfortable cottage in the village of Spetchingley, for the purpose of enlivening and waiting upon the caprices of the Squire, does his best, indeed, to draw him out by a nightly game of backgammon, and a morning saunter along the shore. But his favourite game seems less to excite him, now that it is no longer played in a favourite corner of the drawing-room at Spetchingley; and, instead of enjoying the frolics of Chinks, my mother's old terrier, the only one he brought away, my father and Dick are constantly breaking out into discussions concerning their old favourites in Leicestershire. 'I hope the people are kind to poor Ponto!' says Dick, with a sigh. 'Lady-bird's puppies must be almost fit for breaking.—But, I forget,—there is no head-keeper at Spetchingley now!'—observes my father. And thus they go on, irritating each other's regrets. I sometimes think it would be as well for the Squire if he had no one with whom he could indulge in reminiscences of Spetchingley.

"Mrs. Mordaunt's conduct throughout these trials, is truly praiseworthy. I have heard neither murmur, regret, nor reproach from her lips; she continues to perfect with unceasing attention the education of Jane and Helen; and when, in the course of the investigations that have taken place, any instances of improvidence on the part of our poor mother became apparent (as I must admit was frequently the case,) she was ever the first to assign good motives or sufficient excuses. In short, dear Lizzy, this woman is truly excellent; and, in spite of our first erroneous judgment, we are under serious obligations for the manner in which she lightens the afflictions of my father. If, however, the old man should continue to sink under them as he has from the moment the writ was taken out against him, her task will not be of long continuance. I seldom lose sight of him for more than a few hours together, yet every time we meet, I seem to

discern a change for the worse in his appearance. Be assured, my dear sister, that any new shock would prove fatal to him. He has taken this intelligence of the Duke of Rochester's sad end grievously to heart, and bade me instantly write and ascertain that *you* at least were well and comfortable. He called you 'Betty,' dearest sister, as in former days.—He often calls you so now; his memory seems to be totally failing."

I said not a word to Lady Carleton of this afflicting letter, when she bade me a careless good-bye, expressing a hope that before she returned from Petersham, "every thing would be satisfactorily settled at the inquest."—"I am most anxious to get the funeral over," she observed, "for I want to arrange something about going out of town, I am sadly in want of country air." How cruel a moment, alas! to give me to understand that my visit was becoming an incumbrance.

The fatal hour of twelve struck by St. James's; and my trepidation increased to so unbearable a degree that I resolved to profit at all hazards by Lady Carleton's absence; and, having induced Phillis by a liberal bribe to bear me company, I got into a hackney coach and bade them drive to the end of the street in which stood Rochester House; from whence I despatched my companion to inquire whether Mr. Rawborne and another gentleman had made their appearance. Aware that the inquest was sitting within, a crowd of people had collected round the gate—some crying out against the Duchess, some lamenting for the Duke; and Phillis had considerable difficulty in penetrating through the mob so far as the porter's lodge, where, being personally known, she readily obtained an answer that nothing had been heard of Mr. Fitzirnham or Mr. Algernon Rawborne.

I thought the poor woman long in obtaining a reply to my inquiry; yet, when she rejoined me with such unsatisfactory tidings, I wished she had been longer, to afford me an excuse for lingering upon the spot.

"Why not order the coachman to remain here?" she suggested, after I had expressed my horror of returning to Jermyn-street without having learned the verdict. "It is surely as easy, miss, to sit crying here in the coach, as at home."

Phillis readily took herself off to gossip with the servants at Rochester House, while I remained in the coach from whence I commanded a view of the gates, and the populace gathered round them. I heard a butcher's boy remark to another as he passed—"I say, Jem, what's the row yonder?" "Oh! nothing but the crowner's a sitting on the great lord what cut his throat t'other day, or else found som'un to cut it for him. They wants to bring in non compush somethen or other, 'cause he's a lord; but the people say no go, and if they don't search out the affair, wo be to the crowner and jury when they come out, that's all. Let's stop and see the fun."

The mob was, indeed, becoming violent. Pretexts for popular excitement had been latterly wanting, and the mysterious suicide of a peer of the realm was a sufficient motive for a disturbance. Some of the people bestowed their plaudits on the late Duke as the friend of Fox, and civil and religious liberty; some reviled him as the enemy of Pitt and the throne. Next to the assemblages I had witnessed on the hustings, I never saw so intemperate a one as that which waited the announcement of the fatal verdict!

At length, a plainly dressed man issued from the gates, who seemed well known to the people, for they pressed vehemently round him with inquiries, and his reply elicited a universal groan. In a few moments, he passed the coach where I was sitting, nor could I resist the impulse to call aloud and ask what turn the proceedings were taking. The stranger, who was probably connected with the press, stopped mechanically to reply. "A strong suspicion of murder against one Fitzirnham, who has absconded,"—and hurried on. "Absconded!"—what a word to hear applied to the noble, generous Fitzirnham! —"Absconded!"—the jury then might extend their incriminations so far as to record a verdict of "Wilful Murder" against the accused!—Unversed in the legal process of an inquest, such a verdict already seemed to imply condemnation to death. My fears were roused to frenzy —I determined to present myself at the inquest for examination. *I* could bear testimony to the excitation of the Duke's mind;—could explain—but no! what could I explain?—would not a garbled statement such as my solemn

promise to the Duchess alone enable me to afford, tend to involve the facts in still deeper mystery?—But life and death!—Fitzirnham branded with an accusation of murder, and no one there to put forth one syllable in his vindication!—Dreadful thoughts came thronging into my mind; and, almost before I understood my own intentions, I had left the coach and was hurrying towards those gates which I had so often traversed in splendour, so often in triumph. The people crowded upon me—the press was dreadful. At that moment, I heard an increased tumult; a chaise and four, the horses covered with foam, galloped past! I saw the gates of Rochester House unclose to admit it—the truth rushed into my mind—it contained Algernon and Fitzirnham!—The supposed culprit was safe.

I remember nothing further, till on waking with a painful sensation, I found myself stretched on a bed in a well-known chamber, surrounded with familiar faces. I had been rescued in a state of insensibility from the trampling of the crowd, and conveyed into the porter's lodge of Rochester House; where, being personally recognized, I was removed with all respect into the house, and the attendance of Phillis and the medical men in waiting at the inquest, instantly procured. The contusions I had received rendered bleeding necessary; I was still suffering severely: my head was all confusion—my heart seemed paralyzed to stone.

At length, the cheering voice of Algernon met my ear, and I found it was my cousin's arm by which I was supported.

"Is he safe?" I murmured, clasping his hand in mine; and, finding from this question that my consciousness was fully restored, Algernon beckoned forward Fitzirnham, who was standing concealed behind the rest.

"Is the inquest over?" I faltered, bending towards him as he knelt by the bed-side.

"Many hours ago; a verdict of 'Temporary Derangement.' Nothing, dearest, has detained me in this house but the sense of your danger. You are recovering—I must leave it, Lizzy!—this is no time for explanations."

"One word!" I whispered. "Has any thing transpired to criminate that unhappy woman?"

"Not a syllable. But dismiss these fearful things from your mind; compose yourself—suffer yourself as soon as possible to be removed, that we may meet again in Jermyn-street. Meanwhile," he added, kissing my burning hand, and placing it in that of Algernon, "I bequeath you to the care of this truest and best of friends."

Another glance and he was gone.

"It was impossible for him to remain here," whispered my cousin, while Phillis withdrew to accompany Fitzirnham to the door. "The Duke must ever regard him as the unintentional murderer of his brother; for, though he brought evidence that he was fifty miles on the north road in the York mail at the period the act was committed, the Duke has grounds for believing that the letter in which the excitement of the Duke unquestionably originated, was from Fitzirnham. The contents of that letter are known only to the dead and to our friend. With *them*, let the secret rest."

"May I not now return home?" said I. "To *me* this house is almost as much forbidden ground as to him."

"The physicians insist on your sleeping here to-night."

"In this hateful house! Impossible!"

"It must be so, dear Lizzy. Your safety demands it."

"But Lady Carleton will be alarmed at not finding me on her return from Petersham?"—

"She has been apprized, and permits Phillis to remain here in attendance upon you. She is indignant, indeed, that you should have ventured hither, but quite satisfied that you should stay. In fact, my dear cousin, were you to make the attempt, you would find it impossible to move."

He was right. Severe contusions and bruises rendered me unable to stand. And, when Algernon took leave for the night and I found myself alone with Phillis in that vast gloomy chamber, and remembered that beneath me was the fatal library containing the body of the noble victim and the watchers over his remains, my heart sank heavily within me. I longed for death to relieve me from the pangs of mind and body by which I was tormented.

Midnight at length sounded from the harsh turret-clock of the offices,—and, soon afterwards, a hollow sound arose from the apartment below.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Mordaunt," whispered my

attendant, creeping to my bed-side to conceal her own terror. "It is only the undertakers soldering down the coffin. The inquest prevented things being done as they ought; and his Grace has desired that no further time may be lost. People suppose he was afraid the Duchess might appear in the morning, and insist upon seeing the corpse."

I lay trembling with fever and terror. Before morning, my illness had increased to delirium.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT strange, dreary impressions do we entertain of events occurring around us during delirium; impressions analogous to the illusions of somnambulism under magnetic influence! I remember as in a vision, the death-like tranquillity of Rochester House; and, after many days, a loud trampling in the court-yard announcing the funeral. It was scarcely day-break. The Duke was desirous that the procession, which was destined to Vere Court, in Lancashire, should pass through London while the streets were unfrequented.

I heard Phillis, who was standing at the window of my room watching the departure of the hearse, suddenly utter an exclamation of dismay, as the last mourning-coach quitted the court-yard; but I was too weak for questions. It was not till the close of the week when I was well enough to have my curtains drawn aside, that the first object which presented itself before my eyes proved to be a death's head surrounded with appalling emblems. My chamber happening to occupy the centre of the house, the achievement of the late Duke projected over one of the windows!

The details of a convalescence are tedious to all but the sufferer. Mine was alleviated by visits from Algernon, from Lady Carleton, and, above all, from my dear brother Henry. From the latter, I learnt that Lord Hugh de Vere had returned to Penderels; for the Duchess,

whose pregnancy had been legally signified, was shortly expected at Rochester House.

"You need not give utterance, my dear girl, to our anxiety to quit the house previously to her arrival," said Harry; "If you are in a state to be moved, trust me it shall be done. The Duchess expressed a desire that your marriage should be solemnized under her auspices; but—"

"My *marriage?*"——

"Yes, my dear Lizzy,—every arrangement has been completed. Already I know and esteem your Fitzirnham as a brother. The good offices of our mutual friend Rawborne have placed us on the happiest footing: and your illness alone retards an event which I trust will permanently confirm your happiness. You will be poor, Lizzy; but you must make up in prudence what you want in fortune. Your husband promises to apply himself to the study of the law. He has great abilities: he may yet achieve great triumphs."

Encouraged by such hopes, my recovery was rapid. It was not till the middle of September that the Duchess was expected in town to administer to the will of her late husband: and, just a week earlier, my hand was bestowed by my brother on Fitzirnham. Our marriage, under the melancholy circumstances of the family, was strictly private. Lady Carleton and the Shanstones alone attended me to the altar; and, when I found myself once more beyond the boundaries of London, once more in sight of green trees and fields, commencing a bridal excursion with the husband of my choice, it seemed as if all the events of the last five months were a hideous delusion.

I had indeed still some drawbacks upon my happiness. The reduced circumstances of my family, the conviction recently forced on my observation of Algernon's despair at my marriage,—that marriage which he had been noble enough to forward, but could not find courage to witness!—and, above all, the painful constraint which still, on certain points, produced reserve between me and my husband. With *him* I never dared recur to the past; to *him* I had not addressed a single observation concerning the Duchess, or a question touching the Duke. Time would probably bring to light all that it was desirable for me to know; mean while, I only consulted my own principles in re-enclosing, with a respectful refusal to the

Duchess, a bank note of one thousand pounds forwarded to me by her banker the day preceding my marriage with Fitzirnham.

A gift from another member of my mother's family excited in my mind even more surprise and self-accusal than gratitude. Lady Carleton, whom I had so often reviled as disgracefully penurious, bestowed upon me on my wedding-day a purse containing two hundred guineas; an amount enormous to *her*, whose resources were not overflowing. My uncle Rawborne had already given us a carriage; but Fitzirnham, delicately forbearing even to apprize me of his intentions, declined the sum which my father distressed himself to raise as my marriage portion. From all my family, indeed, I received gratifying tokens of interest and regard. From *his*, not even a token of existence. I knew from others that the eldest son of the late Mr. Fitzirnham, resided at the family seat near Sevenoaks. There was a married daughter, too, on the continent for the benefit of her health. But neither brother nor sister was ever mentioned to me by Fitzirnham; nor did I know whether the estrangement between them proceeded from his part or from theirs. In spite of the unaffected joy he experienced in calling me his, I could discern that a cloud hung heavily on his spirits. He mourned for the Duke as for a father, and a father whom he had hurried to the grave.

I have dwelt long enough on gloomy subjects. A honeymoon—the honeymoon of a pair devoted heart and soul to each other,—demands a lighter strain. I was not yet twenty; in spite of the heavy sorrows that had fallen on me, I was still vain,—vain of myself, vainer of Fitzirnham; while the pride *he* took in me amounted almost to idolatry. On a hint given by the Prince of Wales at one of the Carleton House suppers, that "Miss Mordaunt ought to stand to Roubilliac for a statue of Diana Huntress," Sherwin had insisted on making a sketch of me in that character, aquatints of which may still be found in the collection at Colnaghi's. From this sketch, Cosway had contrived to complete a miniature, which for months past,—months during which I believed him indifferent,—Fitzirnham had worn about his person. "If I have thus worshipped a picture," said he, in confiding the secret to me after our marriage, "judge what homage I shall pay to the original."

It was, indeed, homage,—the homage of unreserved affection. We devoted a portion of Lady Carleton's gift to a tour in the lake country; but anxious to instal ourselves in our London abode previously to my husband's initiation into the weighty business of the law, only a few days remained to be devoted to the sacred duty of a visit to Aldborough. Not but that I felt persuaded my father would willingly avoid an exposure of his reduced circumstances to the eye of a stranger. But it was right Fitzirnham should *not* remain a stranger to him. Mine for life and for eternity, Fitzirnham ought not to be an object of indifference to my father.

I trembled as the moment approached for meeting again, under such altered auspices, those whom I had quitted in haughty dauntlessness of spirit,—fancying myself prepared to buffet with the world and triumph over its opposition. A twelvemonth had not yet expired since I left home,—ignorant, arrogant, presumptuous,—discontented with the prosperity I enjoyed, and confidently aspiring to rank and opulence. I was now returning, wiser in my generation, experienced in the hollowness of human greatness, pining for my father's sake after the once-despised comforts of Spetchingley, but limited by my own choice, to a narrow income,—an obscure station; having refused rank and riches for Fitzirnham's sake, yet grateful to him for having permitted me to share his poverty. It never occurred to me to feel mortified at the idea of appearing before my stepmother and Dick Mordaunt as the wife of a briefless barrister with six hundred a-year: all I remembered was the duty of claiming my father's blessing on our marriage, and the delight of finding myself once more embraced by Jane and Helen.

But, as the time approached for meeting them, and we drove up to the door of the small house assigned to the reduced family, my heart grew sick at the idea of beholding my father exposed to such humiliations. I entreated Fitzirnham to allow me to quit the carriage and meet my family alone. But his good sense prevailed against me.

"Excitement would be injurious to both of you," said he. "The restraint of my presence will divert Mr. Mordaunt's attention; it is better that he should learn from the first to treat me as a son."

Our anxieties were wholly superfluous. Dick Mordaunt was there, fussy and tiresome as ever, to prevent

all effusion of sentiment; interrupting my dear father's embraces and the tears of my sisters, to inquire again and again, whether the carriage were to be sent to the Swan, or the King's Head; and whether he should settle with the post-boys.

I seized the first occasion afforded by my father's absence to offer a sincere apology to Mrs. Mordaunt for my former petulance.

"Say not a word on the subject, my dear Mrs. Fitzirnham," she replied, with a cordial pressure of the hand. "I regarded your little vagaries as the forwardness of a child whom I had not spirit or ability to manage. Trouble, that powerful teacher, has done what my feeble powers failed to effect; and it is indeed a matter of pride and pleasure that I am henceforward to have *three* affectionate step-daughters. How do you find your father?"

I dared not answer her with sincerity. To *my* eye the old man presented a most afflicting spectacle. There was a degree of childishness mingling in his sorrows, that proved how severely they they had influenced his mind. I had left him a hale, hearty, happy 'squire; I found him a bent, gary-headed, broken-voiced old man,—desultory in his ideas, and bewildered in his memory. He seemed to take pride, indeed, in seeing me; and made me sit by him, and held my hand in his, while he gave utterance to his incoherent ramblings. "Your dear mother would have gloried in seeing you married, Betty," said he. "You have just the age and look she had, when I brought her down a bride to Spetchingley. Yes! She would have been proud to see you married; you and Alfred were always her favourites. But it would have been a trying thing to Lady Betty, poor dear woman, to have welcomed you to such a home as this; ay, my child, and it is a sore thing to *me*,—sorer far than people know of. Lady Betty was very fond of Spetchingley,—her children were all born there;—and now she lies there in the quiet old church, where, with God's will, I shall soon rest by her side. That woman was the best of mothers, —the best of wives,—never gave me a harsh word or an angry look. There was not a dry eye in the parish when your mother died: Mrs. Mordaunt and I often talk of it. Mrs. Mordaunt knew her excellence, and has taken a mother's place towards the girls. Jane is growing very handsome, almost as handsome as yourself. You must do

your best for your sisters, Lizzy, when the poor old man is gone. To have done his duty, he ought to have laid something aside for you all when the sun was shining!"—

I implored him not to recur to topics so painful and unavailing.

"By the way, my dear," he continued, "I trust you will apologize to your husband that I am able to afford him only so poor a welcome. Things would have been different had we been still at Spetchingley. I like the young fellow's looks,—a fine open manly countenance. Is he a sportsman, Lizzy?"

I was almost ashamed, as a Leicestershire squire's daughter, to admit that I had never inquired.

"*Not* inquired? See what comes of living in Lon'on! Well, I shall mount him some of these days, and give you my notion of him; that is, when we get back to Spetchingley. My son Harry (a good dutiful son he is) and Dick Mordaunt and the rest, want to persuade me, that in five years or so, I shall be able to return to the old place. As if I *could* live five years away from Spetchingley, where I was born and bred; and the happiest of husbands and fathers!—Lizzy, my girl! it is only the poor old man's bones they will carry back to Spetchingley!"—

CHAPTER XXII.

THE home of our own, to which we repaired on quitting Aldborough, though even smaller than the abode of my poor father, was at least bright and cheerful. The furniture was new; and, ornamented by numberless little gifts of my friends and family, our house wore a certain look of elegant mediocrity, which I have since discovered to be the most dangerous of pretensions. Like most newly-married couples, we were, and were to remain, all-in-all to each other. We knew the world,—despised it,—and were unaminous in our resolve to shun the giddy follies of the heartless multitude.——*Alas!*

Such a determination was, in fact, indispensable to the now sobered projects of Fitzirnham. He was applying himself diligently to the law,—a study equally available should any unexpected change in the fortunes of his party, throw him into the vortex of political life. Under his directions, I, too, devoted my time to the improvement of my mind; and we passed our first prudent winter in the wisest and happiest retirement. We saw little even of my own family. Lady Carleton found neither loo nor tredrille to attract her to our house. The Earl of Rawborne had dropped from his arm-chair into the grave, and his successor was involved in the great annual duty of fox-hunting. The house in St. James's Square was, in fact, shut up; for Algernon, who, much to his own surprise, found himself endowed with a provision of twenty thousand pounds by the unsuspected economy of his fa-

ther, had accompanied my brother to Turin, where Henry was in the enjoyment of a diplomatic appointment. Richard was installed in his rich rectory,—Alfred still in the Mediterranean;—the Shanstones awaiting at Petersham the close of the hunting-season, as a signal for their return to town for the purpose of running down the Earl. By this dispersion of the family, we were secure from those familiar intrusions we should have deemed importunate.

One morning, however, on entering the breakfast room, a month or two after the meeting of parliament, I was saluted by the joyous tones of a well known voice, and the gladdening sight of our friend Charles Fox established at our table.

"My dear Mrs. Fitzirnham," cried he, cordially shaking my hand, "your very looks offer a reply to the question which my friend here has found it difficult to answer,—of why he has thought fit to desert his friends? Not meeting him as usual at Brookes's, we concluded he was spending a Lapland six months' honey-moon in the country. But, my dear Fitz.,—we want you every where,—we want you more than ever. The Prince has repeatedly asked for you."

"I fancied His Royal Highness's honey-moon as engrossing as my own?" observed Fitzirnham.

"No,"—replied our guest—"he is wise or kind enough to conciliate the claims of love and friendship. The Prince has taken the greatest interest in the event of the Westminster scrutiny; and, though the Windsor people have been at work with messages and nogotiations to detach him from us, we find a warmer friend in him than ever."

"Negotiations?"

"The carriages in weekly attendance at Carleton House on levee days, seem to have extended as far as Whitehall, and taught the Treasury that such an opposition may become alarming. His Royal Highness is given to understand that if he will put up with a Dutch wife, and a Tory minister, his debts shall be paid, and his income increased. They have offered him two hundred thousand pounds in hand, and one hundred thousand per annum."

"How agreeable a compliment to Mr. Pitt, to be refused with such a bribe in his hand!" said I.

"And what sort of a compliment to the Princess of Orange?"—added Fitzirnham.

"The Queen, (who, by the way, seems to have trans-

ferred her early affection for the Prince and the new Duke of York to the ever increasing covey of the royal nursery,) has repeatedly spoken to her son in favour of one of her nieces of Mecklenburg; perhaps to ascertain the truth of public report touching his secret marriage. But, alas! as long as *we* remain in favour at Carleton House, Carleton House will remain in disgrace at Windsor, and in debt in town. We are forced, therefore, to drown our sorrows in much claret;—come among us again, my dear Fitz., and teach us some wiser method for the re-organization of our system of philosophy and finance! For your own sake, too, do not abandon a road which leads safely, though circuitously, to distinction."

"I am bent on trying a more beaten way," replied Fitzirnham, with a smile. Pray promise me, my dear Fox, your custom for your first chancery suit!"

"Even as a professional man," interrupted Fox, "connection is of first-rate importance. I will not hear of this hang-dog living in corners. You have no right to rob society of either yourself or Mrs. Fitzirnham; and, if you expect the Prince to remember you when he come to his kingdom, prove that you have not forgotten *him* on so slight a temptation as the enjoyment of a happy fire-side with the handsomest and most charming wife in Great Britain! If you have any regard for yourself and your old friends, show yourself as soon as possible at Carleton House."

A few days afterwards, Mrs. Sheridan, apprised by Charles Fox of my residence in town, came to echo these counsels and reproaches. She assured me it was madness to estrange my husband from his former associates, and ended by peremptorily engaging us to a dinner at her house, where, in the society of the Grevilles, Townshends, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Jekyll, and Tickell, Fitzirnham's conversational talents were drawn out in a manner only too flattering to my pride. In the evening, we had music; and Mrs. Sheridan, who the preceding year had induced the Duchess of Rochester to give me lessons of Arne, took the kindest pains to exhibit me to advantage, by obliging me to join her in a duet. There was great vivacity, great *laisser aller* in the coterie of the Sheridans,

exactly calculated to captivate the fancy of a young person not yet at ease in society. We returned home, too, at the rational hour consistent with professional pursuits; and the same remark attested my husband's satisfaction and my own, that "occasional indulgence in such recreations would but add new enjoyment to the pleasures of seclusion."

Mrs. Greville, Mrs. Vesey, Mrs. St. John, Miss Monckton, the Hothams, Ogles, and various other luminaries of the fashionable world with whom my husband had long been an established favourite, now hastened to honour me with their acquaintance; and the Duchesses of Devonshire and Portland, Lady Duncannon, Lady Melbourne, Lady Jersey, distinguished me by their attentions, the moment they arrived in town for the season.

"My Lizzy," Fitzirnham used to say, when on returning home from his chambers he found the names of such visiters on my table, or their opera-boxes waiting my acceptance; "you are becoming sadly the fashion!—take care that these triumphs do not turn your little head!"—But there was no fear of my head being turned a second time by the bewilderment of fashionable life. The achievement of the Duke of R—— still hung—a powerful ensign of warning,—over the gateway of Rochester House!

From my brother Henry's letters, mean while, I learned that the Pemburys were spending the winter in Italy; and from the newspapers, gathered frequent tidings of the movements of the Duchess. From the period of the inquest, the press seemed to have taken her Grace under its especial protection. She was now "the amiable and interesting widow of the late Duke of Rochester;"—or, "the young and lovely Duchess of Rochester;" and the papers were unanimous in their admiration that "this afflicted lady, all eagerness that the heir of the house of Rochester should be born on the family estates, had determined to await her confinement at Vere Court, in Lancashire,"—no one being at the trouble to notice that five similar events, equally likely to produce a representative to the lordly line of De Vere, had been suffered to take place in town.

In the month of February, these laudations were followed up by an announcement which caused the blood to rise to Fitzirnham's temples, and to retreat from my own cheeks, that "Her Grace the Duchess of Rochester had

given birth to a son, now Duke of Rochester, who was immediately baptized by the family chaplain with the august names of his royal sponsor, "George Augustus Frederick." Then followed a flourish about the ringing of church-bells, and the kindling of bonfires in honour of the event.

"And thus ends the reign of Lord Hugh de Vere!" ejaculated Fitzirnham, after a pause; "and he will return disappointed to his obscure hypochondriacism."

"Mrs. Sheridan informed me the other night," said I, "that Lord Hugh is on the best terms with my aunt. Mrs. Sheridan, who used formerly to meet him at Lady John's, at Vere Lodge, assures me he is the most amiable of human beings,—the very man to be won over by the profound respect shown by the Duchess to the memory of her husband, and the affection she exhibits towards the girls."

"He may have motives for choosing to *appear* deceived," replied Fitzirnham, with a look of incredulity.

"Mrs. Greville, too, informed me that Lord Hugh and the Duchess are left joint guardians to the children and——"

"I trust, dearest Lizzy," hastily interrupted Fitzirnham, "that you have not allowed these friends of yours to extract from your ingenuous soul any opinion respecting the conduct of the Duchess? Little as you and I have permitted ourselves to converse on this accursed topic, be assured that it has been most generally, most severely, discussed; and, were those giddy companions of her's, who are jealous of her beauty without being her superiors in purity, able to extract from *you* any facts sufficiently strong to exclude her from society, they would glory in mixing up our names anew in the scandals and cabals of Rochester House."

"You must be sure," I replied, "that I would allow myself to allude to nothing likely to injure the reputation of my mother's sister."

"In a year or two," resumed my husband, "this woman will emerge into society more brilliant than ever, to win her way to popularity by blandishments and splendour. It is enough that she is the favourite of the Prince, the friend of Mrs. Fitzherbert, to confirm her impeccability. She *must* be received at Court—she *will* be received elsewhere. I know of no house but my own, whose doors

will be shut against her;—but into this, even on her knees, the Duchess of Rochester shall never enter!"

"It is a concession I shall not ask of you."

"She will ask it herself, my dear Lizzy. We know too much of her not to possess value in her eyes. On returning to the great world, the Duchess will see you admired and courted by those whose suffrage she appreciates, and make any sacrifice rather than suffer the world to guess the cause of our alienation."

I seized this opportunity to mention the marriage-gift I had refused from her; but, while my husband commended what he was pleased to term my rightness of mind, he added, "Give no praise to the Duchess's generosity. *She* well knows that her machinations induced the Duke of Rochester to cancel the legacy of thirty thousand pounds he had bequeathed me by his last will."

"A cancelled legacy of thirty thousand pounds?" cried I,—"and you never mentioned it to me before?"

"It has unwittingly escaped me, now. Ask no questions on the subject, dear Lizzy, if you love me. For a thousand reasons which you may conjecture, the most distant allusion to this subject is torture to my feelings."

I obeyed—and was again reluctantly silent.

* * * * * *

Those among my readers, who, even at the price of years, are so happy as to have known Charles Fox, will admit, that like other men of genius of a too sanguine temperament, he saw and heard with his warm heart, rather than with his sober reason. Undeniably master of the affections of the populace, he could not fancy himself wanting in the confidence of the people; and, while others of the opposition who had adopted their political principles as a step to power, beheld in the increasing strength of Pitt, and the inertness of the Heir Apparent, a total downfall of their hopes, *he*, who regarded power only as the means of giving action to his political principles, confidently expected a favourable turn of the wheel. He dealt with public life as with the hazards of the gambling-table; and fancied that something would "turn up" in favour of the Whigs.

With these hopes, unfortunately, he now infected Fitzirnham and myself. Accustomed to regard him as the greatest of politicians as well as the most delightful of men, I yielded implicit faith to his declarations; cordially

echoing his opinion when, (after a homely dinner at our house, preferred to the costly feast of the great for the enjoyment of my husband's society,) he exclaimed,—"Come, come Fitz.—lay aside your musty law books for a single evening, and accompany me to the House. Parliament is your destined place,—Parliament should be your school, Parliament your study. What will the law ever yield you, compared with the distinctions and preferments of public life; and how can you excuse the waste of talents such as yours?"

"It is written, I see, that I must go down with you to the House," cried my husband, cutting short his flatteries with a smile; and soon afterwards, the sudden death of one of the Ponsonby family having occasioned a vacancy for a northern borough, Fitzirnham's relation, Lord Fitzwilliam, at the solicitation of Fox and Burke, brought him into Parliament and effectually blighted the happiness of our little household.

From that fatal epoch, the world resumed its influence over me! At first, I continued to beguile the long evenings of Fitzirnham's absence with books and music. But I soon began to miss the stimulus of his approving smile; to languish after the sound of human voices. My household was too circumscribed to occupy my attention; and a flattering billet from Lady Duncannon, or an affectionate invitation from Lady Melbourne to accompany her to some opera, ball, or concert, sufficed to draw me from my solitude.

Fitzirnham was far from professing the Turkish principle in his matrimonial administration. He took pleasure in seeing me admired, and triumphed in my triumphs. When he beheld the young Lady M—— glittering at the head of a magnificent establishment in all the array of wealth and fashion, and remembered that but for my preference of himself, such would have been my position in society, he seemed to think he could not too warmly forward my participation in the pleasures still within my reach.

There was, in fact, nothing at variance with our system of economy in sharing the fêtes of those to whom it would have been irksome to accept hospitality from us in return. At the close of the season, we found ourselves engaged to pass the summer and autumn in visits to Brocket,—Crewe Hall,—Chatsworth, and Welbeck.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The return of winter was cheered by a family event, in whatever rank of society the most important of a woman's life,—the welcome of a first-born child. It was a girl,—a fair delicate lovely little creature,—*too* fair, *too* delicate to render permanent the moment of inexpressible delight occasioned by its arrival. My ill-fated babe scarcely survived three months; and the most poignant pang I ever remember experiencing, was that with which I saw it consigned to its little coffin.

Brief as was the existence of this pledge of affection, it afforded a pretext for overtures of peace from the Duchess of Rochester.

On learning from the newspapers that I was a mother, she despatched an affectionate letter of entreaty to be permitted to give her name to her grand-niece. Fitzirnham undertook to answer her; he did not explain to me in what terms he conveyed his refusal.

Unsuspicious of the frailty of our tenure of this little treasure, Fitzirnham and myself were enlightened by its birth to the utter inadequacy of our means for the support of a family. His parliamentary duties were now distracting his attention from the study of the law. The prospects of his party were sinking, in proportion to the estrangement of the Prince from political life; we had no expectations beyond the twelve thousand pounds forming the inheritance of Fitzirnham, one half of which was assured by a deed of settlement to myself.

Under these circumstances, we resolved to limit with still closer economy our habits of life. The brilliant society we had been frequenting, presented even in its most gratuitous form, a source of expense; and dress, job-horses, and gifts to servants, absorbed the sum total of an income which would scarcely have afforded pocket-money to one of our gay associates. Even while in their considerate kindness they strove to avoid involving us in the smallest extravagance, the uncalculated expenses of a single night's participation in their pleasures, was ruin to such a fortune as ours; and the price of the evening bouquet of one of my duchess-friends would have absorbed the day's expenses of my whole establishment!

These resolutions, however, were too sage to last. It was only so momentous an occasion as the appearance of our first-born, that inspired my dear Fitzirnham with courage to preach economy. Finances formed a subject which he seemed to consider beneath my contemplation; and he would have lavished his whole fortune to procure me a day's enjoyment. Soon came the heavy affliction occasioned by the loss of my child. In spite of my attempts at resignation, I found it impossible to shake off the remembrance of my disappointment; and when after many weeks, my husband found me every night on his return from the House, still bathed in tears, he began to fancy that other sorrows or discontents must mingle with my regret. To a man,—however tender his nature,—an infant is never more than an infant; while to a woman, the infant that is her own, is greater than all the great or wise ones of the earth. Fitzirnham had watched beside me over the cradle of the feeble babe,—had supported me as I hung over the bed where its little form lay extended in death,—had followed me, as I stole through the twilight to fill with flowers the coffin they were about to close without my knowledge. But, he had grieved *with me*, not for the child! It was for his wife, not his infant, that his tears were shed.

At last, when the prolonged depression of my spirits began to produce an evil influence on my health, he consulted my female friends; who, true women of the world, —instead of permitting a quiet visit to Alborough, where the gentle wisdom of Mrs. Mordaunt and the affection of my sisters would have poured balm into my wounds, insisted that I must be amused; and I was given over to the

golden rule of gay Duchesses and giddy Countesses, who fancied that a life of hurry, banquets, music—would sooth the sorrow of one who had seen her husband's smile brighten the soft countenance of a babe, his treasure and her own, only to fade, and fade into the darkness of the grave!—Apprehensive of exposing myself to ridicule, I obeyed their summons,—I joined their parties,—I laughed with the mirth that was theirs. But there was bitterness mingling in this pretended gaiety. In the secrecy of my heart, I often impiously ventured to murmur against Providence. I said within myself, "I was willing to cast away the things of this world,—to be good, humble, domestic,—yet even this tranquil obscurity has been denied me! My little one is taken from me,—my home is sprinkled with dust and ashes; nothing is left but to plunge once more into the temptations of the world."

There was no longer a wise brother, an anxious cousin at hand, to whisper "Refrain!" My husband, who was now gradually subjecting himself to the ascendency of ambition as I to that of vanity, saw me amused in the society of those with whom we were hereafter to be launched in the career of public distinction, and regarded the whole as a mere move on the chess-board of preferment.

Although his affections were wholly devoted to me, the faculties of his mind were in truth otherwise engrossed. At the suggestion of Charles Fox, he had thrown on paper the result of considerable research into the state of affairs in India; and his pamphlet, warmly commended by Burke, was by the advice of the party, hastily given to the press. A second edition was called for on the day following its publication,—a third,—a fourth. India was just then the prevailing topic of the day. Warren Hastings had been recalled,—his impeachment was meditated; every one was feeling or affecting an interest in the question; and "*Who* has written this admirable exposé of the India business?" was demanded with interest from one end of London to the other. But flattering as was the reply—"I really don't know: but now Johnson is gone and Burke going, there is some satisfaction in hailing a new writer of so much promise," Fitzirnham was steadfast in his determination that the work should remain anonymous. He was content with the laurels bestowed upon him by the hands of his friends.

Habituated for years to the society of men now immortalized by their eminence in statesmanship, literature, science, art,—I have often puzzled myself to decide which of these illustrations affords in the attainment the strongest excitement to the mind? It produced a feeling almost amounting to jealousy in my bosom, to see with what facility Fitzirnham had burst the silken bonds of domestic life, to rush into the jarring field of politics: I now saw him estranged even from politics by the anxieties of authorship. This first and unprecedentedly brilliant success touched an unsuspected chord in his bosom. His ambition was taking a new or rather a twofold direction; but it brought with it twofold labour, which deprived me of the society of my husband. Often, on his return at three o'clock in the morning from the House, I have known him fling himself exhausted on the sofa; and, after an hour's repose and copious draughts of tea, apply himself to the decipherment of tedious documents, or the study of foreign works connected with the business to which his whole thoughts were directed. He was preparing for fresh efforts,—for new public exertions,—but he was also preparing for the grave!—

It is difficult for a woman, even of the sternest order of mind, to enter into the self-denial connected with these barren laurels of renown. We sympathize in the love of power,—the love of pelf; but we do not forgive the absorbing love of fame which throws our very selves into the shade. I saw Fitzirnham renounce rest,—food,—recreation, to devote himself to studies productive only of the praises of reviewers and the plaudits of the House; but I could not understand that *my* interruptions should also become importunate;—and, at length, resented as an injury the intense application consuming his days and nights. I own it with shame and grief,—but it was so! —I had promised him better things;—I had augured better things of myself. While still uncertain of his regard, I fancied that to share with a man thus highly endowed the cares and triumphs of his public career, would be sufficient for my happiness. I was undeceived. Already I experienced the wants of more trivial companionship.—Young, trifling, vain,—the burning ploughshare had as yet passed but lightly over my heart.—The deep, searing, scathing wounds that bring wisdom, repentance, and humility, were still to come.

Fitzirnham occasionally looked cold and absent, when I was relating to him some flippant anecdote connected with the gay resorts to which, at his suggestion, I repaired as a refuge against solitude;—the fall of some bright particular star from our glittering sphere, or the detection of some cowled hypocrisy among the prudish with whom we were at war. Impatient or angry, he never was; but I fancied I should prefer petulance to the indifference of his mild abstraction. That this depression of spirit was the evidence of an insidious disease, never entered into my calculations.

"How glad I shall be when the session is over!"—cried I, one day, when he was proceeding at an early hour to some parliamentary committee.

"Thank you!" he replied, with affectionate good faith. "I am indeed more harassed than I have strength to bear. It will be a welcome relief to get into the country!—I have promised to pass a month at Beaconsfield with Burke, the moment Parliament is up."

Unluckily, *I* had promised to enjoy *my* first month's relaxation at Brocket; nor had I courage to disenchant him by avowing that my ejaculation bore reference solely to my own convenience.

I had indeed many motives for wishing the session and season at an end. Without having been guilty of culpable extravagance, many expenses had been forced upon my incurrence which I could no longer meet without having recourse to Fitzirnham's purse. The sum given me at my marriage by Lady Carleton, had hitherto sufficed for my personal expenditure; and I had often laughingly assured my husband, that I would not apply to him for that hateful pittance called pin-money, till the close of my second year of married life. Three months of the stated period were yet to elapse,—and I was a bankrupt!

It would have been following the genuine impulse of my heart, to tell him so, and claim his indulgence. But I had already noticed that his affairs were somewhat in disorder; that bills were occasionally presented which he found it impossible to pay; that we had, in short, greatly exceeded our income! Ignorant of the value of money, it puzzled me to conceive how an establishment so circumscribed, could have betrayed us into undue expenditure; but my kind, generous husband had no greater anxiety than to avoid enlightening me on such points, which might

seem to imply reproach against my own want of fortune, or want of thrift.

Under such circumstances, I would sooner have asked him for the blood in his veins, than for pecuniary assistance. Ask my lover-husband, poor and embarrassed,—poor and embarrassed, for my sake,—for *money?*—Impossible!—I resolved to apply to Lady Carleton for a trifling loan; for, at the close of three months, I knew that Fitzirnham, true to a day, would place in my hands the allowance covenanted between us.

The Viscountess was in the frequent habit of dining with us,—I had constant occasions of doing her service, which my sense of obligation forbade me ever to neglect; and I thought myself in some degree justified in seeking so small a favour from the sister of my mother.

"Oblige you with the loan of twenty pounds for three months?" cried she, lifting up her hands with amazement, when with fear and trembling I unfolded my request. "Why, child, I never have fifty pounds I can call my own. My jointure of eight hundred a-year, scarcely enables me to live like a gentlewoman; and, but for the assistance of your brother Harry, I could not have afforded to have you staying in my house before your marriage."

"You make me blush, my dear aunt, when I remember your splendid wedding-present!" said I, shocked at these admissions.

"Why, you surely were never childish enough to suppose I could afford that sum of money out of my own pocket?"—

"Not out of your *own* pocket?" cried I, now blushing in earnest.

"To be sure not, my dear. The two hundred guineas came from my nephew Algernon, who knew you would be in want of pocket-money; and that under your father's straightened circumstances, you had nothing to look for in that quarter. You could not have accepted the sum, if offered by himself. Sorely against my will, therefore, (for one hates to have the undue credit of a generous action,) I consented to pass for the donor. I declare I never felt so uncomfortable in my life as when you were thanking me for my liberality;—for the Shanstone girls were present, and I felt that I might be expected at some future time to do as much for *them*. But, my dear, how is it that you are already in difficulties?"

"I am not in difficulties. But, when engaged in parties of pleasure, it is necessary to have a guinea or two in my purse, or I must be obliged to some one to pay for me, at Ranelagh, or Vauxhall."

"A very foolish practice!" observed Lady Carleton. "That you have not your purse with you, is quite a sufficient excuse for getting franked; and that you have it, often leads to the annoyance of having to frank other people. I had no idea you ever dreamt of paying, when you were with such people as the Devonshires and Melbournes?"

"I should be ashamed to *be* with them on other than equal terms," I replied, proudly.

"Ah! Lizzy,—that is just the tone you used to talk in when you first came up to me from Spetchingley, with your head stuffed full of nonsensical notions;—and see what it has all come to!—Whereas, if you had chosen to marry Sir Robert Warley or Sir Claude Lovell, instead of the younger son of nobody knows whom, or rather, of every body knows whom,—you might have had some grounds for giving yourself airs."

"I am far more inclined to give myself airs as the wife of a man distinguished by his talents and friendships, such as Fitzirnham, than if married to a boor, like Warley, or a sot, like Lovell."

"Perhaps so, could you supply the *de quoi* to keep Cupid from starving. But, after Fitzirnham's renunciation of the Duke of Rochester's legacy, in order to make you his wife——"

"*Renunciation* of the Duke of Rochester's legacy!" interrupted I,—

"Yes! the legacy of thirty thousand pounds."

"That bequest was eventually cancelled by the Duke."

"Only in the event of Mr. Fitzirnham's marriage with Miss Mordaunt."

"I do not clearly understand you?" said I,—almost dreading to become enlightened.

"Why you surely must be aware that on the day preceding the poor Duke's melancholy end, he had an interview with your husband?"

"Which referred to subjects wholly unconnected with myself."

"I won't pretend to answer for what passed. But there is good reason to suppose, that Mr. Fitzirnham,

whom all the world knows to have De Vere blood in his veins, demanded his Grace's sanction to a marriage with the Duchess's niece,—for, when the will was opened, a codicil appeared in the Duke's own handwriting, rendering the legacy of thirty thousand pounds bequeathed many years before to De Vere Fitzirnham, expressly contingent on his renouncement of an engagement to Elizabeth, the daughter of Edward Mordaunt, Esq., of Spetchingley;—yes!—expressly contingent; and, from the colour of the ink, and other circumstances, the lawyers gave it as their opinion, that this codicil was added a few hours previously to his decease,—and subsequent to his interview with your husband."

"And he had the nobleness to make this sacrifice without hesitation, and to keep it so carefully from my knowledge!" cried I.

"To be sure, my dear, you were a wretched match for him!" rejoined my delicate aunt; "particularly as you seem to be so bad a manager. You know I have often told you, you were going on too fast. Every time I dine with you, I remark that second courses are not made for people of *your* income. I'm sure I don't know what you can do to get out of the scrape. Algernon is no longer here to help you, and I don't fancy there is much to be got out of his brother. Lord Rawborne, except where his personal pleasures are concerned, is a perfect curmudgeon. Supposing you were to write and ask the Duchess?"

"Rather beg in the streets!" was my involuntary exclamation. "No! I shall apply to my husband. What forgiveness would there be for me, did I show want of confidence in one who has so nobly sacrificed his prospects in life for my sake!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

But it is time I should say something of the Shanstones, who certainly were not remiss in affording matter for comment; though neither Clara nor Lavinia fulfilled our expectations by figuring as Countess of Rawborne, or Rectoress of Spetchingley. An event, far indeed remote from our family, had imposed an obstacle to their matrimonial speculations:—Mrs. Bumptext was no more!

To the Dowager's snug nest at Petersham, did the widower in his weepers betake himself for consolation. Instead of appearing there, as heretofore, one day in seven, to brighten his intellects with Burton ale and qualify his potations with saintly counsel, his visits came to be of daily occurrence, and his parables to assume the figurative unction of Solomon's Song. When, lo! one fine evening in June, when the nightingales were singing among the lilac-bushes, and the groves of Petersham adorned with that "greenth" and "gloomth" commemorated by the affectation of Horace Walpole,—the saint, who had been purring sanctimoniously for a full hour by the side of Lady Lavinia, under the shadowing branches of a horse-chestnut tree in full bloom and buckle, (mightily resembling a bishop's wig,) suddenly threw himself at her feet, and besought from her the gift of a fair hand which, according to my aunt Carleton's version of the story, was that of her daughter Clara, but which Sir Obadiah's widow chose to fancy was her own.

The billing and cooing of a pair of saints under a

stnut-tree were certainly enough to put the nightingales to silence; but no sooner was it known in the family that my aunt had consented to become Lady Lavinia Bumptext, than her two nephews became silent also. Both Lord Rawborne and my brother Richard desisted from their courtship, *not* because it was likely to give them a Tartuffe for a father-in-law, but because the marriage-portions of the girls lay at the Tartuffe's discretion. Lavinia and Clara had therefore small cause to regret their mother's infatuation, since they were thus relieved from two interested suitors; and, as her ladyship persisted that, for example's sake, Bumptext should remain two years a widower, there was every probability that his saintship would stuff himself into an apoplexy before the close of his probation. Mean while, I saw little of the family. They rarely came to town; and I had no horses to enable me to visit them in the country.

A circumstance, however, occurred, which threw me considerably into their society. Towards the close of the session, the labours of which had been so injurious to the health of Fitzirnham, I observed that he had frequent interviews with a "gentleman in black," whom I took to be a poor author, but who proved to be a rich man of business. On these occasions, my presence was strictly avoided; but one day, as I unconsciously entered the room where they were sitting together, I overheard my husband say to his guest,—"Well, well, let it be managed in any way that does not affect *her* interests!"

To what all this might refer, I had no means of conjecture. Soon afterwards, however, I perceived that our debts were paid; and that my husband not only "put money in his purse," but into my own. That it was derived from an honourable source, I was too well satisfied to trouble my head on the subject. Fitz. had probably realized a handsome sum by his pamphlet, in addition to having raised those gratuitous groves of laurel, which Dick Sheridan used to call "the groves of Blarney."

"These new riches of ours give me courage to prefer a request," said I, one day to my husband. "You are in want of country air and country quiet. Instead of the tour of visits we projected, which will but repeat the fatigues and exertions of London, let your slaves of the ring secure us some little tiny cottage for the autumn,

where we may economize at our ease, and grow strong and healthy at our leisure."

Scarcely had I spoken, when my wish was accomplished. Before the end of the week, Fitzirnham told me, with one of those sunny smiles which I have never seen expand on any human countenance but his, that he had hired a small place in the country, a cottage smothered in China roses and a neighbourly neighbourhood, at the foot of Richmond Hill! This brought me into contact with the Shanstones; but it brought a large counterbalance in the shape of pleasure; for I was enabled to have my sister Jane for my inmate, while Harry, who arrived from Italy in the course of the autumn on a visit to my father, became occasionally our guest.

It happened that Lavinia and Clara—who, after their mother's matrimonial engagements, were no longer kept so closely under her wing—were drinking tea with me, when my brother made his unexpected appearance. Till then, he was but slightly known to them, and knew *them* chiefly as the subject of many a jest between us on Richard's account; but no sooner did Clara learn that he had parted only a few weeks before at Leghorn from Algernon Rawborne, than, breaking through all ceremony, she accosted him with a thousand questions concerning our favourite cousin. I was grateful for her interference; for a sort of uneasy consciousness restrained me in Fitzirnham's presence from minute inquiries into his health—his spirits—his pursuits; while, from the frank, open-hearted Clara, such questions seemed proper and natural.

I know not whether it were the effect of Harry's cordial and affectionate allusions to his friend, or the charm of his handsome person and finished manners, but I trace to that first interview, a transfer of Clara's partialities from my cousin to my brother; as well as the strong affection which soon sprung up on Henry's part towards Clara Shanstone. There was, in fact, considerable analogy between the dispositions of Henry, Algernon, and Clara—a sort of family likeness, which is frequently the basis of a tender passion.

What a happy autumn it was! To my sister Jane, who, though entering into womanhood, had seen nothing of society, Richmond with its sociable tea-drinkings, and Willowell cottage with its cheerful circle, presented a scene of marvellous gaiety; while in herself I found a

cheerful, intelligent companion, and a graceful ornament to our little circle. Instead of the stately pride of the first Miss Mordaunt, of Spetchingley, she possessed a grace and *naïveté* of character infinitely more bewitching.

One morning, soon after Harry had brought her to Willowell, we were favoured with a sober morning visitation from our serious neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Quiesbury, just as Fitzpatrick and Fox had driven over to us from Strawberry Hill.

"We had the pleasure of calling yesterday at Petersham," observed Mrs. Quiesbury, who was seated near my sister, "and found them together. What a charming couple they will make!"

"Provided Lady Lavinia can be induced to give her consent," replied Jane, supposing the solemn lady to allude to my brother and Clara, whose mutual attachment was now becoming the subject of general remark.

"My dear ma'am,—she has already consented!"

"Oh, no;"—cried my sister—"he has not even proposed. Every one would fancy his motive was interested in such a match."

"He is rich in the things that are not of this world," interrupted the sententious Mrs. Quiesbury; "rich in that which passeth show.—*His* treasure is one where moths do not break through and steal!"

Jane, labouring to preserve her gravity at the misquotation, ventured to observe, that "In *that* respect, there could not be a couple better assorted."

"And such a thing, ma'am, for his poor dear children, to chance upon such a stepmother!" chanted Mrs. Q., waiving her head, "One who has proved such an exemplary mother to her own!"—

Jane was now completely bewildered; and from the mutual explanation that ensued, it appeared, that the Quiesburys were referring to the venerable Bumptextian pair, instead of Clara and my brother. But to this trifling misunderstanding, was Henry indebted for the most fortunate event of his life!—The Quiesburys, who had jog-trotted to Willowell, for the purpose of acquainting us that they had called the preceding day at Petersham, jog-trotted soon afterwards to Petersham, apparently for the purpose of acquainting the Shanstones that they had called the preceding week at Willowell;—nor could their

unincidental life furnish a more interesting anecdote for the edification of Lady Lavinia, than the curious blunder of little Miss Mordaunt, relative to the loves and courtships of the family. Nay, Old. Q. grew almost jocose in relating the particulars! The old lady, however, pondered his sayings in her heart, and saw nothing jocose in the affair. Deeply hurt and offended by the desertion of her two nephews, she caught at the idea of being sued by the elder son; for the hand of the daughter tacitly rejected by the younger. Lady Carleton persisted that she was anxious to remove Clara out of the sight of the repining saint; but, to do him justice, no man could conduct himself more honourably than Dr. Bumptext, in the negotiations that ensued. He it was whom Lady Lavinia deputed to tender her daughter's hand, with a dowry of one hundred thousand pounds, to my astonished brother; and, in the course of a week, Clara and Henry found themselves betrothed, as if by enchantment.

My poor father's consent, as may be supposed, was readily obtained. He conditioned only that, dependent as Henry must be upon his wife, he should not on his marriage relinquish his diplomatic avocations; and sorely against her will, Lady Lavinia saw her daughter depart for a land of Papistry. Had any confirmation been needed of my cousin Algernon's praises of Clara's disposition, the kindness of her proposals to my brother, that Jane, who like most girls educated in seclusion was smitten with the love of travel, should accompany them to Italy, —would have re-assured us.

The loss of these three favourite companions created a miserable void in my existence; and, from the day of their departure for Turin, Willowell seemed stripped of its attractions. After Clara's marriage, I found the vicinity of Petersham an annoyance. Lady Lavinia was one of the many who can be partly, but not wholly generous. She could part with five thousand a-year, in favour of her daughter and nephew; but not without calling upon me twice or thrice a week, to complain of the lamentable deficiency produced in her income. Miss Lavinia, too, whose constitutional sourness was by no means sweetened by the projected alliance of her mamma, and the unexpected marriage of her sister, bestowed her murmurs upon me with uncousinly cruelty. The best of the Richmond society, deserting their Thames for the Avon, win-

tered at Bath; while the Quiesburys and their kind remained as stationary as the hill itself: had it not been for the fear of inconveniencing Fitzirnham by my inconsistency, I should have entreated him to give up Willowell and return to town.

Parliament met, and things grew worse and worse. My husband was obliged to take up his residence in chambers more than half the week, and to pass more time on the road than either he or I were inclined to spare. Like most other women, in short, *I*, who had found it impossible to remain in London after the month of June, found it nearly as difficult to remain in the country after the month of January.

"These caprices of your little ladyship will be the ruin of me!"—said Fitzirnham, kissing me on the forehead the day he rode down to announce that he had hired a small ready furnished house in Chesterfield Street.

"You are too kind in acceding to them!" said I, ashamed of my own exactions.

"Do not, however, take a fancy for Carleton House," he resumed with a smile,—"for *that*, you know, I *cannot* give you. Our residence at Willowell has cost us exactly three times what we set down for it. I claim your assistance, dearest, to prevent a recurrence of this at our new residence: for it would be wrong to conceal from you, Lizzy, that our want of management has already encroached largely on our little capital."

"Then I am, indeed, unpardonable!" cried I. "It was doubly my duty to supply my want of fortune by excess of prudence; yet"—

"Do not be overhasty to accuse yourself, my sweet love," interrupted Fitzirnham; "the fault has been my own: nor be discouraged by any remark that may have fallen from me. You have no grounds for uneasiness. Our prospects are brightening. I supped with Fox and Hare last night. They tell me that Sheridan has large bets at Brookes's that we shall be *in* before the close of the session; and, as Dick is just now Cabinet-councillor *par excellence* to His Royal Highness, he has doubtless good information."

"Fox is so easily elated!"

"But not less easily depressed. By the way, my dear girl, I have a little word of advice to give you previous to our reinstallation in the world. Though the disorder of

His Royal Highness's affairs, and his intention of bringing them before Parliament, have put an effectual stop to the entertainments at Carleton House, yet there are abundance of other places where you must inevitably meet the Duchess of Rochester."

"The Duchess!—is she settled in London?"—

"In greater force and beauty than ever. Her widowhood expired,—her weeds laid aside,—at the head of one of the finest fortunes in the kingdom, she attracts, as you may suppose, universal attention."

"Even Lady Carleton, whose ill-nature is never more venomous than when alluding to her sister, declares that nothing can have been more unexceptionable than the conduct of the Duchess in the strict retirement she has courted since that unhappy event," said I, in a deprecating tone.

"Nothing more judicious,—for she has afforded time for the whole affair to be forgotten,—forgotten by all but myself; and the request I have to make you, Lizzy, is that"—

"Do not make it!" cried I, stopping his exhortations by a kiss. "I can fully enter into your desire for the cessation of all intercourse between us and Rochester House.—Trust to my utmost efforts to prevent any renewal of overtures on the part of the Duchess."

MEMOIRS

OF A

PEERESS.

VOL. II.

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18995

MEMOIRS

OF A

PEERESS;

OR,

THE DAYS OF FOX.

EDITED BY

LADY CHARLOTTE BURY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

La plupart des hommes ne connaissent pas ce monde qu'ils ont toujours sous les yeux; par la raison qui fait que les hannetons ne savent pas l'histoire naturelle.—Boufflers.

PHILADELPHIA:

E. L. CAREY & A. HART.

1837.

POSTHUMOUS MEMOIRS

OF

A PEERESS.

CHAPTER I.

ALTHOUGH the splendours of Carlton House were completely in eclipse, the prince's establishment curtailed, his equipage sold, his entertainments suspended, I scarcely remember to have seen him so ingratiating in manner and address as under these mortifying circumstances; his royal highness probably judged it expedient to replace those absent aids to popularity by increased urbanity of demeanour. Under his present intention of appealing to parliament for relief, popularity was more than ever essential.

He had other little embarrassments, too, to surmount, the exertions indispensable to which, imparted new graces to his deportment. With all his personal attractions and enlisted from so early an age in the annals of gallantry, it was not possible that the Prince of Wales should attain his six-and-twentieth year without creating rivalships and jealousies, such as serve to convert into furies fine ladies and finer gentlemen. He had been faithless too often, and was now become too exclusively faithful, not to find lovely brows knit upon him, over which had once waved his own armorial plume; and there was consequently an attempt at deprecation, as well as at affability, in his mode of smiling his way through the crowds of the fashionable world. For

my own part, I admit that his royal highness's mere tone of addressing me in society, to inquire after his "friend Fitzirnham," had power to bring the deepest blushes into my cheeks.

Between the Prince and Windsor there was total estrangement. When the chances of private or public life brought them together, the filial obeisance of his royal highness remained unnoticed by the king; and this unnatural state of alienation seemed to be ostentatiously promoted by those whose duty towards both was a duty of conciliation. When the prince's application for an increase of income was peremptorily rejected by his majesty, instead of attempting to shake by argument the obstinate opposition infused into the mind of the king by the policy of Pitt, the prince saw fit to render his embarrassed finances a martyrdom in the eyes of the people. Carlton House was ostentatiously shut up; not cleansed alone of hungry parasites and foreign libertines, but closed against the decent claims of hospitality. His stud was paraded in solemn ovation through St. James's Street to the hammer. His costly buildings and improvements were not only suspended, but consigned by studied neglect to premature decay. His train of domestics was dismissed; his equipages sold. His royal highness was henceforth to be only the most public of private gentlemen. In vain did the Duc de Chartres, who, having succeeded to the title and prodigious wealth of his father, had already visited England as Duke of Orleans, renew his offer to take upon himself the discharge of all claims upon the heir apparent. His royal highness's sense of dignity as an English prince of the blood, interdicted the humiliation; and it was settled that before the close of the session, parliament should become umpire between the prudence of the sovereign and the prodigality of his son.

It was not, however, by matters of such temporary interest that the mind of Fitzirnham was engrossed. The commercial treaty between England and France had occupied his attention throughout the winter; and the impeachment of Warren Hastings was about to be followed by the trial which, far more than his offences, has served to immortalize his name; and my husband, in conjunction with Burke and Sheridan, was giving his nights and days to the consideration of the claims and sufferings of that world of nations, which the strong right arm of our own comparatively insignificant tribe, had laid in chains. His own inte-

rests were forgotten—his own affairs neglected—his own health disregarded—to minister to the justice of a cause involving the interests of millions. Our creditors preferred *their* claims while he was thus engrossed; and were dismissed by the readiest and most ruinous mode of payment —the absorption of our little capital—in order to free his powers of mind from the harassing influence of importunity. It was not worth while to hazard a day's tranquillity at such a crisis, for the sake of a hundred pounds. But, how could the demands of creditors be otherwise than importunate, when even the society of the wife he loved was an unwelcome abstraction!

"Amuse yourself, dear Lizzy," he would say, as he locked himself into his study with his reading lamps and MSS. "Go, dearest, and amuse yourself; these peremptory occupations render it impossible for me to devote myself to your society!"

I *ought* not to have obeyed! I ought to have known that where a husband is compelled to *earn*, a wife should feel herself compelled to *spare;* and, while Fitzirnham lavished his physical and moral powers on the acquirement of a name for the eventual acquirement of fortune, I, like a thrifty housewife, should have sat at home, ready to soothe such moments of harassed leisure as he could snatch from his laborious avocations.

Instead of affording this evidence of an affection—heaven knows sincere—I rushed abroad into the world, to be flattered by princes, and courted by duchesses; dazzled by brilliant sights, entranced by melodious sounds, bewildered by the giddy chimes and changes of fashion—neglectful, in short, of all the higher duties of my sex.

The auspicious marriage of my elder brother having given a more cheerful colouring to the prospects of the Mordaunt family, my father readily consented that my sister Helen should pass a season with me in town. I had thus a companion redoubling my motives or excuses for accepting the flattering overtures of my fashionable friends; and while Harry, that best of brothers, liberally provided the means of introducing her with advantage, my wiser stepmother alone entreated me not to expose too largely the gentle but somewhat feeble character of my pretty sister, to the intoxications of a scene so much at variance with the humble routine of her hitherto contented life. Alas! forgetful of my own heart-burnings and soul-freezings in Jermyn-street, I whispered to myself with a smile at this suggestion,—"My sister shall return to that routine no more; she

shall form a brilliant marriage!" As if Helen were to have no voice in a question where Elizabeth had exercised so much!—But Helen was of a different order of character from either of her sisters, and the happiest and most amiable creature in the world. I used to call her the Neutral Tint —so well did she harmonise with every scene and every society of which she formed a part.

It happened that the three leading beauties of our society, the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Duncannon, and Lady Melbourne, had each just then the prospect of becoming mothers; so that the wild dissipations of the preceding year became subdued to a more chosen range of society; we had fewer balls, but more play; and the applause of the idlers of public places fell to the share of such secondary divinities as myself and my sister. It was, however, scarcely possible to find a face more regularly beautiful than that of Helen. With the exception of the young daughters of Lady Jersey, I scarcely ever beheld so lovely a face.

Among the young people of the present day, I find few so fair as those that graced the circles of my own. There was a sort of swanlike dignity in the time of hoops and minuets, a mode of carrying the head and rounding the arm, very different from the hurrying headlong deportment, and slouching gait of to-day. The ladies of the land certainly walked and talked better, during the reign of blue stockings and Sir Joshua!

One night, soon after Helen Mordaunt's arrival in town, we attended one of Colonel Dottin's masquerades; and, though closely masked, our tall figures arrayed in Swiss costume attracted so much notice, that I was not sorry to have secured the attendance of Sir Marcus Hamilton and Lord Ailesfort, who were devoting considerable attention to my sister. In particular, we were followed by a Neapolitan fisherman, whose remarks outstepped the bounds that render compliment complimentary.

"Very fine creatures for milk-maids!"—cried our tormentor. "To see them toss their heads, one would fancy they had never been within hail of an honest fisherman before. Yet, after all, I doubt if they are anything better than the daughters of a country 'squire."

"Sir!" cried Sir Marcus, in a rage.

"Hush, hush!" I interrupted. "We are in a place of privileged impertinence."

"Hark, again!" cried the Neapolitan. "Some people are fond of crying out against sauciness, who themselves"—

"My good friend," said Lord Ailesfort, "let me recom-

mend you to leave these ladies to the society of those who are privileged to protect them from your intrusions."

"Privileged? *Santissimo Gennaro!*" exclaimed the unsilenceable sailor; "not half so privileged as myself!"—and, as he was actually on the point of placing his arm round my waist, Sir Marcus thrust him aside, and would have torn off his mask, when our mutual exclamation of "Dearest Lizzy, don't you know me?"—and—"Alfred, my brother Alfred!"—put a hasty termination to the dispute.

It was indeed Alfred, who, arrived in London from the Mediterranean, had followed us, by Fitzirnham's advice, from Chesterfield street to the masquerade. And well might his sisters be excused for not recognising the awkward Eton boy, in the fine, tall, manly officer who now presented himself; but who, as a gallant lieutenant, had not outgrown the thoughtless pranks of boyhood.

"What events in the family since I quitted you, dear Liz!" he exclaimed, as soon as Sir Marcus profited by his appearance to share with his rival the task of entertaining my sister; "First, alas! poor Spetchingley paid off, and my father left at sea. Then your marriage,—my uncle Rawborne's death, which puts a hundred-a-year into my pocket,—and Harry's match, which they say has put five thousand into his! By the way, I hove off to see Algernon, t'other day at Venice, where he has established himself, and lives at once like a prince and a misanthrope;—a wreck,—a complete wreck,—and all your doing, Miss Lizzy! He tried to talk of *you*,—but it would not do. The tears came into his eyes every time your name was mentioned. Not so Harry and his wife, with whom I spent a week at Turin, and who could talk of nothing else."

"And Jane?"

"Jane was taken up with the sighs of young Rothesbury, one of the *attachés*. By the way, I came home from Turin with the Pemburys."

"The *Pemburys?*"

"We arrived at Dover this morning, and they will be in town to-morrow. A fine fellow Pembury, and *she* a charming woman."

"I do not know *her*, and do not like *him*."

"So he told me."

"He *dared* allude to the subject?"

"He said there was a cloud between him and my lovely

sister, Mrs. Fitzirnham, which he trusted to my intervention to clear up."

"Do not ask it, my dear Alfred. Lord Pembury is one of those with whom I have no wish to renew my acquaintance."

"Nonsense, nonsense! Pembury is an honest, plain-sailing fellow; and if he has happened to be a little remiss in the quantity and quality of his bows and *congés*, never mind,—he shall make up for it now. I *must* have you like Pembury! I shall bring him to call upon you as soon as he comes to town."

Alfred was clearly one of those on whom argument is thrown away; I determined, therefore, to trust to my future ingenuity to avoid Lord Pembury's acquaintance. Meanwhile, it puzzled me greatly to conjecture, on what ground he was to stand with the Duchess. Although my aunt had not yet appeared in public since her arrival in London, I heard of her from those who had dined at her magnificent residence in Spring Garden, as looking younger and handsomer than ever; having laid aside her former flippant gaiety for a quiet dignity, infinitely more becoming. The young Duke appeared to be the engrossing object of her life. But her daughters resided with her; and lady Isabella, now sixteen years old, was said to be a model of grace and beauty.

We had not yet met; and, as my husband persisted in his determination of estrangement, I dreaded the chance of an accidental encounter in society. For my own part, I could have wished that peace should be between us. Rochester House having been sold and razed to the ground, streets and squares were already erecting on the site: and even thus I could have wished it to be with our resentments. Lady Lavinia having migrated with Dr. Bumptext to the land of his ancestors, was residing at an estate she had bought and settled upon him and his children, near Kelso; lady Carleton, sinking into the regular Rawborne superannuation, was kept alive only by snuff and tredrille. Lord Rawborne, was exclusively a man of business;—for the turf and the whist table were to him no matter of sport;—so that my own family afforded me not a single available companion. But Fitzirnham was inflexible! He persisted that the Duchess of Rochester was no companion for his wife.

But the bold *brusquerie* of persons genuinely frank, bids defiance to all conventional forms. My brother Alfred was one of those to whom the deferences of ceremony appear superfluous. Arrived in his native country after a three

years' absence, he felt privileged to bring a friend to a sister's house with a claim that both should be well received; and no sooner had Fitzirnham quitted home the following day, than in walked my brother—accompanied by Lord Pembury! It was too late to raise objections. There he stood before me, bowing ceremoniously during Alfred's straight-forward apostrophe.

"Bess—I have brought my friend Lord Pembury, who fancies he was out of favour with you when he quitted England; so give him a hearty welcome, in the first place for my sake, and in the second to prove you are not the vindictive puss he imagines."

By this strange introduction, Lord Pembury seemed not a whit embarrassed. I found him strikingly altered in manners and appearance, grown older, milder, more silent, more absent; and like other quiet people, seeming to take pleasure in the noisy rattle of Alfred. No sooner, however, was my brother engrossed in conversation with Helen upon home matters, at the other side of the room, than, approaching me, he whispered an apology for having taken my house by storm—pleading his desire to be beforehand with my interdiction of his visits.

"It is now three years since I became anxious to offer humble excuses to you," said he. "My eagerness has been increased by many a conversation on the subject with my friend Rawborne, in whose society I lived exclusively at Venice. I quitted England at the desire of Lady Pembury; I return hither with her sanction—which may suffice to prove to you that I return an altered man. Be in charity then with me, my dear Mrs. Fitzirnham; suffer me to account myself among the number of your friends, and I shall be content that my long absence has not been in vain."

"The number of my friends is regulated by the opinion of my husband," I replied; "and that Mr. Fitzirnham is not altogether guided by my inclination in such matters, is evident in the fact that he does not permit me to hold communication with the Duchess of Rochester."

"Mr. Fitzirnham is to blame," replied Lord P. in the same calm tone. "Kindred blood is the cement by which tribes are founded, and from tribes, nations. Unless families hang together, where can we hope for union in the world?"

"Were my support in any degree important to the

duchess," I observed, "he might, perhaps, have been more placable."

"The support of a virtuous woman must always be important; the friendship of a beloved niece, gratifying. For my own part, the longer I live in this world of roses and thorns, the more I learn to revere those philanthropic axioms—'Bear and forbear—live and let live;' and to reverence a faith, whose Christian founder has made it the condition of having our trespasses forgiven, that we should forgive the trespasses against us. In this, I am not pleading the cause of the duchess, but my own. The Duchess of Rochester I have not seen—am not likely to see; there will be no renewal of even acquaintanceship between us. I am only speaking for myself—"

"And *of* yourself, like an egotist as you are!" cried Alfred, who had exhausted his inquiries of my sister. "I can't guess how people find such an immensity to say about their own feelings, opinions, and so forth. I swear, Pembury, I have heard you and Algernon go prosing plausibly on, hour after hour, gliding along in the moonshine, in one of those cursed Venetian coffins, till you made me as sleepy as the water dozing below. After a man has owned himself hungry, thirsty, tired, glad, sorry, angry, or ashamed, what the deuce more *has* he to feel? All those subtilties of yours and Algernon's, about souls and innate ideas, and such sort of rhodomontade, appear to me mere devices of Satan, to mislead poor mortals into error."

This speech, which provoked no reply from Lord Pembury, made me conscious of a feeling which Alfred had not included in his list of sensations. I felt *curious*—to learn the nature of these disquisitions between my hermit-cousin and his guest; nor was I sorry, when, on applying that evening to Fitz. for permission to call on Lady Pembury, he replied; "The Pemburys returned to England? visit Lady Pembury? Why not? You will find her one of the most charming women of your acquaintance."

It had long been clear to me that the Duchess of Rochester's inexpiable offence in his eyes consisted in her treachery towards myself and wanton attack upon the memory of his mother; a suspicion confirmed by his want of rancour towards Lord Pembury.

With the renewal of my acquaintance in this quarter, however, came the renewal of other recollections. A week or two after the arrival of Lady Pembury, she was the first

person to point out to me an alteration in the appearance of my husband.

"The last four years have effected strange changes in us all," she observed. "But in Mr. Fitzirnham, the change is more than strange—it is alarming!"

"The mere consequence of late hours and close application."

"What more is wanting," observed Lady Pembury, "to undermine any human constitution?"—

"You have been looking on the sun-burnt faces of Italy," said I, "till we poor, pale, chilly mortals of the north, appear mere spectres in your eyes."

"The remark is more just than you suppose," she replied. "Nothing strikes me more in my return to England, than the 'pale cast of thought' impressed on the countenance of our men of eminence. In the south the

'Souls made of fire, and children of the sun,'

are rarely of a reflective turn. Full of gesticulation—of emphasis—they expend the energy of their minds in demonstration; while the English, concentrating all within the depths of their hearts, exhaust nature by excess of feeling and reflection."—

"You think, in short, that Fitzirnham has a care-worn look?" said I. "Remember he is now a family man; doomed to support the woes of wedlock as well as the business of the nation."

"I cannot jest upon the subject," said Lady Pembury. "You, who have your eyes daily on the same object, are not struck by symptoms which to me have all the force of contrast with the fine, reckless countenance I left here three years ago. I confess to you that the sight of Mr. Fitzirnham has greatly shocked me."

This candid admission ought to have secured my confidence. But I felt displeased that any other woman should effect so strong an interest in my husband. The duchess's former animadversions on the intimacy of Lady Pembury with Fitzirnham recurred to my mind, and did not tend to improve my graciousness.

"Pardon me, if I have offended you," said Lady Pembury, discerning my coldness. "But as one of the earliest friends of De Vere—as the ward of the late Mr. Fitzirnham—I feel an interest in the subject, such as may have encouraged me to presume too far upon your good nature."

I now felt still more indignant. There appeared some-

thing amounting to positive disingenuousness in my husband's reserve upon this topic. He had often alluded to Lady Pembury as an acquaintance;—a woman hurried into fashionable dissipation by an ill-assorted marriage;—he had never spoken of her as the ward of his father. Too proud to avow my suspicions, I resolved to discourage all advances to intimacy on the part of the lady, and to refrain in Fitzirnham's presence from allusion to her name. This, indeed, was easy—for I saw little of him now. Involved in labours similar to his own, Charles Fox sought relief from political cares in the excitement of play—Sheridan, in the hazards of theatrical speculation—while Burke, more wisely, renovated his faculties in domestic tranquillity. *My* husband retired from the toils of the senate to the toils of the study. His leisure was pledged to the booksellers. When fainting with exhaustion of mind and body, he had resort to restoratives only that he might accomplish the renewal of his exertions.

And all this passed unobserved before my eyes!—Alfred rallied me on being married to a bookworm; Helen regarded him as an ambitious man, resigning present enjoyment for the prospect of public distinction;—even his political associates challenged him with being too laborious—too covetous of fame—too assiduous.

The over-tasked man was labouring for the daily bread of his family—and I knew it not!

CHAPTER II.

The time was now arrived for a declaration of hostilities between the King and the Prince of Wales; and the impatient creditors of the latter were only to be pacified by a fulfilment of the engagement of the city of London to apply to parliament in his behalf. Mr. Pitt having proclaimed with an air of haughty defiance in his place as minister, that no intention existed on the part of the king to release the heir-apparent from his difficulties, Alderman Newnham gave notice of a motion intended to render the hoped-for grant a matter of political contention. Votes were mustered by government from all quarters, against the question; and threats held forth by Pitt to expose to the public a correspondence involving distressing details of the nature of his royal highness's embarrassments. Mr. Rolle, (the unhappy "De'nshire Squire," damned to everlasting fame as the hero of the Rolliad), proceeded still further, by express allusions to the private marriage of the Prince of Wales; and, from that period, perpetual meetings took place at Carlton House between his royal highness and his private and political friends,—Grey, Fox, Sheridan, Fitzirnham, Alderman Newnham and Sir William Lemon, the two members to whose hands the measure was confided in parliament.

But in this, as in other instances, the prince displayed only partial confidence in his friends; and when, in the course of a debate, preparatory to the motion of Alderman Newnham, Charles Fox was heard to disclaim in the name of his royal friend any marriage between the prince and Mrs. Fitzherbert, the surprise of society could only be equalled by the indignation of the lady. That Charlie was the dupe of equivocation on the part of the prince, no one doubted; and the Duchesses of Portland and Devonshire,—nay, even the Duchess of Cumberland,—hastened to demonstrate by their attentions a conviction that the disavowal originated in anxiety to throw off, even at the expense of honour, the harassing embarrassments in which the prince was involved.

An accommodation,—unhappily tardy,—at length took place between government and the heir-apparent. At an interview between his royal highness and Mr. Pitt, it was

agreed that arrangements should be made for his relief, and the alderman's critical motion withdrawn. But *who* was to remedy the effect produced upon the public mind by the pitiful offence offered to a defenceless woman? The prince undertook to restore the fair fame of Mrs. Fitzherbert to at least the ambiguity of reputation she had hitherto enjoyed. But who was now to be the dupe or the deceiver among those, through whose intervention alone, a lie could be forced upon the acceptance of the House of Commons?—

Charles Fox, justly indignant, refused all further interference. Mr. Grey, a young man entertaining the most chivalrous sense of honour, rejected an application to the same purport. Sheridan was the only member of the party to whom the wishes of the prince, on this and all points, were at once law and gospel.

It was at this time I noticed an increase of lassitude and despondency on the part of my husband. Scarcely was the delicate question of the grant of an addition of the prince's income and the payment of his debts decided, and the establishment at Carlton House replaced on its former footing, when I perceived a coolness between Fitzirnham and his royal highness. Less alarmed by a circumstance which threatened extinction to our hopes of preferment, than mortified by a withdrawal of those courtesies so flattering to my idle vanity, I questioned my husband on the subject.

"Do not be angry with me, for having deprived you and Helen of a few fêtes and galas"—he replied, with a melancholy smile. "I am in disgrace—and you may suppose that cogent were the reasons which determined me to incur such a risk, when I admit that my last remaining hopes emanated from the friendship of the prince. Fox and Grey have patrimonial fortunes. Burke possesses, apart from private property or official emolument, an income as the agent of America. *I* have nothing to look to but the patronage of the prince. Yet I renounced it, Lizzy, and for ever —if to be purchased by so vile a concession as a lie—a lie dishonouring the reputation of a virtuous woman, the companion of my wife."

"You did rightly," said I—proud that he had escaped a snare fatal to Fox; and despised inducements irresistible to Sheridan. "I thank you for my friend—I thank you for myself—and henceforward accept with pleasure the disdains of Carlton House. But tell me—are our means, indeed, so dependent on courtly favour? May we not still, by retirement—by economy"——

"Too late—too late!" ejaculated Fitzirnham, pressing his hand upon his forehead. "Economy might have prevented the evil—but will not repair it. The prince had long held out hopes to me of a place in his household. On this inducement and my sanguine expectation of our party coming into power, nearly all that was tangible of our fortune has been dissipated. From Carlton House, I have now nothing to expect—even the most sanguine of the Whigs begin to despair. We must trust, Lizzy, henceforward, to our own resources."

"But, you say, they are already exhausted?"

"The six thousand pounds settled on yourself are still secure."

"Three hundred a-year!" said I, aghast—but more alarmed for him than for myself. "Why—why—did I add my persuasions to those which induced you to relinquish your profession! *There* at least—"

"Regrets are unavailing," interrupted Fitzirnham, mildly. "Exertion is all that remains for me. I have already profited largely by my aptitude for literary occupation. So long as I have health and strength, employment of this kind cannot fail; and unless proud Lizzy of Spetchingley should feel ashamed to be the wife of a bookseller's *littérateur*—"

"Poor, pennyless Lizzy of Spetchingley—whose folly has reduced you to these straits!" cried I—throwing myself into his arms. "Why have you kept all this so long secret from me?"

"Would I could do so still!" he replied, with a proud embrace, "since even this slight hint of my distress has served to drive the colour from your cheek. But, be not thus terrified, dearest, be not thus cast down. While my health will admit"—

"His voice faltered; and, fixing my eyes earnestly on his face, I seemed to discover for the first time, the ravages effected there by the ruthless hand of care! Vile egotism! that it should have needed such an incentive to reveal to me the decaying strength, the breaking constitution of him I held so dear!

"Fitzirnham!" I faltered—my heart sinking within me. "You have done worse than disguise from me the disorder of your affairs. You are suffering—you are ill—you"—

I could not conclude. I clung weeping to his bosom, and felt that his own tears were falling upon my shrinking head.

"Was this well done?" said I, recovering at length the power of utterance. "Oh! be well, dearest—be well—be strong; renounce all thought of business—all thought of gain; recover—only recover! There will yet be time for the re-establishment of our affairs. Let us instantly leave town—let us seek a pure air—let us"—

"Compose yourself, my sweet wife," interrupted Fitzirnham. "It is the dread of this impetuosity which has hitherto kept me silent. I am well, Lizzy; I am in no sort of danger; a little over-tasked, perhaps, during this arduous session, but soon to recover after the cessation of my parliamentary labours."

"No, no!" cried I—"Lady Pembury was right. Lady Pembury was quicker-sighted than I have been! These exertions are killing you, and it is my fatal folly in which they have originated. But fear no further weakness on my part. From this day, I renounce society—I renounce the world—and devote myself to those domestic cares, which may wed you with yet dearer influence to your home."

"Is it for *my* sake you would do this?" inquired Fitzirnham. "Do no unacknowledged feelings of mortification mingle in your resolution?"

"None! on my word—my honour! But you have a right to imply doubts of my stability of character!" I faltered. "I have not deserved your confidence."

"You *have* deserved it—and you have it—pettish child," said Fitzirnham, imprinting a gentle kiss upon the brow that lay half-hidden in his bosom. "I merely wished to express, my dear Lizzy, that the real interests of your husband would not be consulted by any sudden change of system likely to provoke inquiry into your motives. I have hampered myself, dearest, with public responsibilities; I belong to my constituents—to Lord Fitzwilliam; I cannot quit London."

"Other members obtain leave of absence on the score of health?"

"Others, with influence and interest. Your husband is but an humble drudge, whose pretensions to his seat consist in assiduity and usefulness. No, Lizzy, I must remain;—and since it is thus, do not draw upon me the distrust of my creditors, and the officiousness of my friends, by proclaiming your terrors. Live as you *have* lived, among the gay and great; smile with those who smile,—look lovely among the loveliest. Let me have still *one* thing to be proud of,—one flower adorning the desolation of my path. Lizzy!

did you but know what bitter hours the mere sound of your voice has had power to soften!"

"But have I not a right to share the penance of those bitter hours? Might not my voice be ever ready to soothe, my hand ever ready to be clasped in yours?"

"No!" said Fitzirnham, raising me gently from his bosom and placing me aside, while the big tears, long gathered in his eyes, rolled silently down his cheek. "Too much of this would unman me. I want courage, Lizzy, I want strength of body and mind to meet the perplexities gathering upon me. Your tenderness makes a woman of me. Look at me, beloved! and say whether I am now in a condition to present myself in my place in parliament!"

"At least," said I, perceiving that Fitzirnham was preparing to leave the room, "I cannot suffer my family to be a further incumbrance to you. Alfred, it is true, sails next week for the Baltic; but Helen."

"Helen must not leave us one day earlier than was proposed," said my husband, firmly. "Her interests in life might be seriously injured by quitting town; nor would I for worlds have Mr. Mordaunt rendered uneasy by the suspicions that must arise from her premature return to Aldborough. All I ask of my dear wife is composure. Prudence, I feel that it is no longer necessary to inculcate."

Composure!—Agitated as I had been by this interview, how infinitely did my perturbation increase when no longer supported by Fitzirnham's exhortations! Ruined! his health desperately impaired, and compelled to efforts of mind so far more painful than the heaviest manual labour. My husband, my noble, high-minded Fitzirnham, he whom I would have surrounded, at the cost of my heart's blood, with all the joys and luxuries of life! *Ruined!*—perhaps *dying!* and ruined and dying for my sake!

And I was forbid to weep—forbid to disclose my consternation—forbid almost to repair my errors! I was to go smiling and fooling it on, amidst the glittering pomps of society, while the dews of exhaustion rose on his sallow forehead in the stillness of his midnight toil! What bitterness was in my heart as all this presented itself for the first time to my imagination! I wrung my hands; I cried aloud—I cursed myself as the origin of his misfortunes!

Nor was there a friend in whose bosom I could seek alleviation. To admit my distress was, in fact, to become a beggar. Henry's obligations to his wife were such as precluded application to *him*. Richard had closed his heart

and purse even against his own father. My only friend was Algernon; Algernon, to whom in this instance I should have felt it treachery towards Fitzirnham to apply, even for compassion.

And there was the world! the mob of gaudy, noisy, fluttering things; driving, without motive, from place to place; surrounding themselves with music to which they do not listen; flowers, which they do not see; delicacies, for which they have no appetite; literature, for which they have no comprehension; the world—to which I might confide my tears; my terrors; my despair! Oh! with what anguish did I that night, in obedience to the commands of my husband, parade my pale cheeks and aching heart through the thronged assembly of Lady Tankerville. I fixed my haggard eyes on a glittering tiara gracing a palsied head, the cost of which would have yielded redemption to one of the noblest of human creatures! I saw around me all the prodigality of wealth; all the levity arising from its possession. Never before had I estimated the bitterness of envy excitable in the human bosom by inequality of condition! I felt as the beggarwomam may feel, who, sitting on the door-step of the great with a starving child upon her knee, hears within the exulting clamour of prosperity, the fulness of plenty; and in her own hollow bosom the whisper of the fiend, calling upon her to "*curse* GOD *and die!*"

There was one person, one member of even that brilliant assemblage, to whom I felt half inclined to turn for solace. But how, after all my ungraciousness, to re-accost her? How admit my fears for Fitzirnham to Lady Pembury, without at the same time admitting the causes and necessity of his exertions? From her I might have obtained the information I now desired and dreaded, whether the illness which detained Fitzirnham's sister in the south of France, were of a pulmonary tendency. But had I a right to admit that no intercourse subsisted between him and his ostensible family; that among his many sources of fatal mortification, was the consciousness of bearing a name to which he was, in honesty, unentitled?

I dared not! I continued to return with an unmeaning smile the mechanical curtsey of one in whom, at such a time, I might have found a valuable and consoling friend! Even Alfred, who might have served as intermediator between us, was gone to renew the hazards of his precarious profession; and I looked at my pretty Helen as she sat opposite me at her work, with the first delicate bloom of girlhood

hovering on her cheek and the sweet confiding smile of perfect happiness beaming in her looks, and had not courage to wither up the blossoms of her youth, by participation in a grief to which she could yield no alleviation.

Whenever it was in my power, however, I assigned to others the task of escorting my sister into society. Many of my friends whose daughters were not yet presented, took delight in the chaperonage of a girl so fair and fashionable as Helen Mordaunt. Society, which soon discerned that she was indebted for her conquests to no paltry arts or unfair manœuvres, forgave her success, and, before the close of the season, I received a visit in form from the old Countess of Ailesfort, to inquire whether any objection existed to the marriage of her only son with my sister. None was assigned on the part of Helen, none on that of her family, except a fear that the respectability of her connections might not be regarded as a counter-balance to her want of fortune. But the dowager, eager only for the early settlement in life of her only son, gladly accepted the compromise: and, while my own heart was breaking with grief and dismay, I had to receive the congratulations of all London on the auspicious alliance in my family.

In such a case, there was no need to apply to the generosity of my brother. Henry insisted on enabling us to meet the event with becoming splendour. Our little household sparkled for the last time in honour of the nuptials of "the Countess of Ailesfort!" and, when the carriage and four drove from our door conveying the ennobled bride to the castle of her lord, Fitzirnham, gazing upon me with wistful eyes, whispered mournfully, "Such, but for me, would have been *your* destiny! And now, nothing remains for my Lizzy but debts and despair."

The session closed at last. The season was over. The leaves began to assume their autumnal tint; but *this* year there was no hope of a cottage in the country. Our difficulties rendered removal impossible. The Devonshire family departed for the Continent; Charles Fox had already quitted England. Our usual country society was almost entirely broken up; and Crewe Hall and Ailesfort Castle, to which we were warmly invited, were too remote from London to admit of the expense of such a journey.

"I must remain here *and work*," said Fitzirnham, glancing round our now desolate habitation. "I might pay a country visit or two, alone; but the benefit of change of air

would not repay me for the loss of the dear society most essential to my happiness!"

Could any earthly consideration propitiate the ruthlessness of destiny—that stern Nemesis embodied by a Pagan creed,—it might be the spectacle of two young people united in heart and soul, and struggling hand in hand against misfortune! We had every thing but one. We enjoyed youth—station—honour—admiration; but we were poor, miserably poor; poor with that hopeless poverty whose prospects end in a prison or a grave.

I have often in my age strove to console myself with the belief that Fitzirnham held in his constitution the germ of our national disease. His mother fell an early victim to consumption; and it may be that the short feverish cough which, as autumn advanced, began to render his nights sleepless and his days uneasy, would have attacked him, even had he not been harassed by the importunities of creditors and the bitterness of retrospection.

But, alas! whatever were the contingencies of the case, that which was certain and before my eyes, was a slow miserable disorder, aggravated by a thousand irritations.

I saw Fitzirnham become every day paler, feebler, more emaciated. His eyes grew larger in their orbits, and more impressive in the earnestness of their expression. His lips were compressed, his nostrils dilated by oppression of breath; still, he persisted that he was better; that he was *well*; that occupation served to divert him; that a recumbent position being painful, it amused him to sit up and write. Had Fox been in England, so great was the tenderness of his nature, that he would instantly have discerned the truth, and insisted upon a remission of labour. But he and Grey were both in Italy; Burke was settled for the autumn at Beaconsfield, and of too formal a character to be addressed by letter; and the rest of Fitzirnham's intimate associates were dispersed for the sporting season in various parts of the kingdom.

Few of them had followed the prince to Brighthelmstone. The part taken by his royal highness in the parliamentary discussion of his affairs, had destroyed the circle of his adherents, who were replaced by buffoons and profligates, by a Barrymore, a Hanger, a Queensbury.

The newspapers teemed with accounts of the exploits of their unmeaning joviality; their intrusions on public notice at theatres, races, boxing-matches, as performers, not spectators, of the sport; while a crowd of foreign libertines, attracted by the attentions bestowed on the Duke of Orleans,

swelled the train of royalty without adding an iota to its dignity.

Yet, revolting as were such traits of degradation in the young, handsome, witty, gallant Prince of Wales, what would I not have given that Fitzirnham were still of his society! Every day, the autumnal fogs of the metropolis grew heavier; more damp; more chill. Every day, I saw more clearly that change of air and cessation of toil were essential to the invalid; yet could I have commanded a miserable twenty pounds, instead of effecting his removal, the sum would have been instantly applied by my husband to quiet some pressing creditor.

"We who are in debt and danger," he would say, "must not presume to be fanciful. This climate suffices hundreds of thousands; it must suffice *me*." And, when he patted my cheek to enforce the justice of his argument, I could feel every pulse thrilling and throbbing with fever; I could hear in the very hollowness of his voice, that his destiny was accomplishing!

Fitzirnham himself, following the usual impulses of his insidious disease, looked confidently forward. The spring was to restore him. Relieved by relaxation from his parliamentary vigils, he found he was gaining strength, and that the renovation of a milder season would effect the rest. The spring was to bring with it the long anticipated India cause; the trial of Warren Hastings; the trial that was to dispense retribution to the oppressors of the East, and immortality to the advocates of its suffering millions.

"You will not know me again, next May," he sometimes whispered. "My anxieties will then be repaid, my toils partially suspended. I shall have created to myself a name; a career. I shall be no longer the doubtful adventurer stigmatised by the Duchess of Rochester!"

How could I check expectations which seemed to afford the sole sustainment of his vital powers? The medical men whom, on pretence of indisposition on my own part, I called in to pronounce upon his state, did not bid me wholly despair. They spoke of the force of youth, the strength of the human constitution. They saw, I verily believe, how dearly my life was bound up in his, and had not courage to pronounce sentence of death upon two hearts so passionately entwined together!

But their forbearance scarcely deceived me. I saw, if not the hopelessness, the extreme peril of the case; and my attention was concentrated upon every trifling change

of that beloved countenance, every modification of Fitzirnham's voice—every look—every gesture.

In the silence of the night, I often heard his restless steps in the room below; and, stealing to the door, would seat myself beside it, that he might not be harassed by my watchfulness. Hour after hour have I sat beside it, my head upon my knees, listening to the heavy sighs that burst from his bosom; to the half-smothered invocations of my name; to still more solemn appeals to the name of the Almighty. Then came the hectic cough, stifling the words upon his lips—the moan of pain—the murmur—the sob—the anguish!

One evening that we had been passing together, he suddenly rose from his writing-table, and flinging himself on the sofa, dropped into one of those heavy unrefreshing sleeps characteristic of his disorder.

As soon as I saw him completely overpowered, I stole towards him, and observed with horror the cold dew risen upon his forehead—the matted clammy hair—the blue lips—the eyelids deeply stained by every wandering vein. I heard his struggling respiration—his heavy sighs.

At length, words burst from his lips, which for a moment I referred to the child that had been taken from us. I drew nearer to listen—I hung over him; and perhaps the movement disturbed his slumber, for he instantly opened his eyes.

"Is it dead?" was his involuntary exclamation.

I pressed his hand in silence. It was plain that he had not fully recovered his consciousness.

"Nay, then—so much the better!" he added. "Poor boy—poor child of shame! It might have lived to brood, like myself, in the solitude of a broken heart."

This could not refer to a babe of ours. I soon discovered that his dreams had been bewildered by an adulatory paragraph contained in our morning paper, referring to the young Duke of Rochester, who had been attacked by some disease of childhood.

"Nothing," these journalists observed, "could exceed the attentions bestowed upon his grace, who had now entered his third year, by the amiable duchess, his young and lovely mother, and his guardian, Lord Hugh de Vere, only brother of the late Duke of Rochester."

"Admire this, Lizzy!" said Fitzirnham, as, rising from his recumbent position, he related to me the announcement. "Admire the chain of social hypocrisies, created by a

breach of chastity! Lord Hugh de Vere, quitting his retirement, his sick bed, his despondency, to watch over a feeble infant in whose veins not a drop of his blood is flowing—to yearn over it, as all that remains to him of a beloved brother; while *I*—his nephew as much as if fifty dignitaries of the church had consecrated his connection with my unhappy mother—am dying here—alone—unheeded—destitute." I pressed his hand in mine in token of sympathy.

"A wanton woman who deceives her husband," he resumed, "thinks she has done all—and hugs herself in her triumph. Rarely does she deceive the world, which avenges itself not only upon her, but *hers; never* that jealous God, who visits her sins upon the generation her frailty has brought to light! My mother expired, a victim to remorse, but even this did not suffice. The curse is still upon her son. I belong to nothing—I belong to nobody; on the De Veres I have no legal, on the Fitzirnhams no moral claim."

"Disturb not your mind by such thoughts," said I. "You have made to yourself a name, a destiny, a family. You have an idolising wife—you possess the esteem of all belonging to her. Would you but permit me to lay the state of your circumstances before my brothers"—

"Never!" interrupted Fitzirnham. "If canker be in the heart of the tree, let it fall, rather than live supported by props that do shame to its nature. But this is no time for discussion," said he, staggering from the sofa towards the table. "My printer is waiting for the copy of these last sections on the Commercial Treaty. I must work till day-break, Lizzy. I cannot write when morning comes with its interruptions—its vile, humiliating interruptions—its duns—its necessities. Go to bed, my dear girl—leave me to my occupations."

"I will go on one condition," said I. "Your illness is increasing. It is our duty to neglect no human means of cure. Promise me to see Warren: he attended you in your childhood; he knows your constitution. Promise me for *my* sake to see him *once*, and abide by his advice."

"Go to bed!" said Fitzirnham, pushing me playfully towards the door. "Are not *your* prognostics dispiriting enough without those of a physician? Go to bed!"

"I will not stir,"—I persisted, "till I have your promise. Dearest husband, this once! for this once only, accede to my entreaty!"

"Be it so!" he replied in a graver tone. "Since you choose to hear my sentence from the lips of the oracle, content yourself."

"You promise?"

"To bed—to bed;—you have my word."

The following day, accordingly, Dr. W. was called in; and long and earnest was the conference between them. But Fitzirnham contrived to circumvent any private interview between myself and the doctor; and, as our position precluded the possibility of requesting a continuance of his visits, I felt that I had gained little by a consultation, of the results of which I remained ignorant.

Next day, as I sat at work during Fitzirnham's absence, the carriage of the physician again stopped at my door; and I trembled lest he might have so far mistaken our views, as to consider himself in permanent attendance.

"Mr. Fitzirnham is in Lincoln's Inn." said I, welcoming him in confusion, but determining with a beating heart to seize the occasion for obtaining a direct opinion.

"I know it," replied the doctor. "It is *you*, my dear madam, I am come to see to-day."

"And, alas! I have scarcely courage to thank you for the visit. I feel that it is not as the bringer of glad tidings you are here;"—and I trembled too violently to pursue my proposed inquiry.

"You are mistaken. My errand is ex-professional. I come *as* and *from* a friend. We doctors, you know, are privileged people. It is part of our duty to push our inquiries into the moral as well as the physical causes of disease. We must understand the position of a patient, ere we assign due importance to his symptoms. In this view, I have ventured to extend my surmises respecting your husband, and to take into my confidence one who, like myself, was his father's friend, and like myself, is deeply interested in the welfare of your husband.

"It was at old Fitzirnham's house in Kent, that, five-and-twenty years ago, I became acquainted with Thurlow;—and yesterday, after my interview with your husband, I happened to meet him at Windsor. The chancellor, in short, is most anxious to see and befriend the son of his old acquaintance. Politics, he says, have hitherto disunited them, but politics on such occasions should be laid aside.

"Thurlow has considerable patronage unconnected with politics, and an earnest desire to advance the interests of your husband. But my young friend is of an over-sensitive

spirit, rendered doubly irritable by disease; and I should have some difficulty in proposing the question. You, my dear madam, must negotiate for us."

I thanked him as such goodness merited, but avowed my want of courage to propose to Fitzirnham even an interview with the lord chancellor.

"I will have no refusal," resumed Dr. W. "I undertake no cure unless the mind of my patient can be placed at ease. I do not disguise from you that this young man is in danger,—but I am not altogether without hope. Co-operate with me, and we may save him,—save him to be a blessing to yourself and an ornament to the country."

That very evening, accordingly, I expressed with more seriousness than I had yet ventured to assume towards Fitzirnham, that it was a duty he owed to himself and me, to profit by so bright and unexpected an opening as the overtures of Lord Thurlow.

"He wishes to entangle me in obligations, which must ensure, if not my subservience,—my silence,"—said Fitzirnham, fractiously.

"No!—I have authority to assure you, that the preferment he would offer is not of a political nature."

"A living, perhaps?"—demanded my husband with a smile —"Who knows?"—Perhaps he may even venture to bribe me with remote prospects of a mitre!"

"I am convinced he means nothing but good-will and faithful service."

"Some sepulchre in the colonies, bought with interchange of patronage!" pursued my husband. "What say you, Lizzy? Will you exchange Chesterfield street with its body-guard of creditors—its legion of devils—for some African consulship?—Will you try Tangier or Sierra Leone, for change of air?—Or, what say you to Cape Breton or Cape Cod, for a winter season?"

"I say, that you are perverse and ungracious!—Here is a man who would lay aside his political enmities to assist you"—

"My dear Lizzy,—I would fain trifle, where it is impossible to afford a serious reply likely to give you pleasure. The preferment intended for me may be wholly disconnected with politics; but given by one of the most eminent political partizans in the kingdom, it ties me down in obligations never to be shaken off. *My* public position is an obscure but a decided one; the friend of Fox and Burke, the

once devoted servant of the prince must not be cited as having accepted favours from the lord chancellor of the tories."

"He must starve, then, with his family?"

"He *must!* Such is the nature of public virtue! Such is the gulf to which the modern Curtius devotes himself."

"But my dear, dear husband!" cried I; "this is no ordeal of political consistency; it is a mere act of private friendship. Lord Thurlow is conscious of obligations to the late Mr. Fitzirnham, and would willingly repay them to yourself."

"Enough!" interrupted my husband, in a tone that admitted of no reply. "The question is now set at rest. Interrogate your own heart, Lizzy, and ask whether it is for *me* to receive favours as the son of Mr. Fitzirnham?"

And, to my infinite mortification, he returned so haughty an answer to the letter addressed to him by the chancellor on the following day, as to preclude all further overtures.

CHAPTER III.

"I HAVE three welcome pieces of intelligence to communicate to my dearest sister," wrote Harry Mordaunt, at this crisis of my domestic troubles. "First, that I am a father of a fine boy, whose dear mother is doing as well as possible; secondly, that Jane's engagement to young Rothesbury meets with the unqualified approbation of his family; and thirdly, that I am appointed secretary to the embassy at Naples. Join with me, dear Lizzy, in thanking heaven that the prospects of the Mordaunt family are thus strangely brightening. My own marriage, and those of Jane and Helen, are happier and more fortunate than my father could have hoped for us in his highest prosperity. Alfred and Richard are advancing rapidly in their professions; while our dear Lizzy, united to a man so excellent and eminent, and established, if not in opulence, at least on the sunny side of the hill, has a life of happiness in enjoyment, distinction in prospect. Under these circumstances, my mind being at rest as regards the welfare of my family, I devote all my interests and views to accelerate the release of our good father. What a triumph to replace the old man in his proper station, and behold him, like Israel of old, go down in honour to the grave, surrounded by prospering and grateful children!"

My heart sank within me as I perused the exulting words of my brother! I felt that there would be a broken link in the chain he hoped to see united—a withered flower in the wreath. Heavy sighs burst from my bosom; I dared no longer look forward! Fitzirnham had distinctly admitted that unless able to fulfil a literary compact—the completion of a History of India—for which he was to receive the price, at that time enormous, of five hundred guineas, he must fail in engagements of the most serious nature.

"I am beginning to fear," said he, wiping the cold moisture from his forehead as he made the confession, "that nature is against me;—that, sacrifice myself as I may, the victim will be offered in vain; but"—

I interrupted him to implore permission to address myself to one of my brothers, or to Lady Lavinia.

"Such an appeal would I never pardon," was his reply.

"I know in what light I have been represented by the Duchess of Rochester to the Mordaunt and Rawborne families; let not my own wife place me in that of a beggar. Remember that, for the first time, I assume a husband's authority, and *forbid* you to make those applications. Do you understand me—will you obey me?"

"I do—I will!"

"On your word I rely," said he; "and were I to discover that you had broken faith with me"—

He was interrupted. Dick Sheridan, accidentally in town for a day or two, dropped in to take an unceremonious dinner with us. "Ill, and under the care of a physician?" cried he, after our first words of greeting, "when we were all puzzling ourselves to guess what could keep you drowsing your autumn away in Chesterfield Street! But, my dear Fitzirnham, profoundly as I bow to Warwick Lane, my faith in fresh air is infinitely greater! You are deucedly fallen away; you ought to be in the country. A milder climate would restore you at once. Supposing you try a trip to France?"

"And my constituents?" said my husband, with a ghastly smile.

"All *that* might be readily managed," cried Sheridan. "Lord Fitzwilliam, so much your friend, and the most gentlemanly and amiable of men, would facilitate every arrangement; and"—

"No! I hold to my seat in parliament, and am pledged next session to Burke on the Hastings business, in a way to forbid all idea of quitting England," said Fitzirnham, his pride rebelling against an avowal of the truth. And, in the course of half an hour, they were deep in politics, deep in constitutional questions, deep in the projects of Carlton House, the obstinacies of Windsor—in all that could withdraw Fitzirnham's attention and that of his guest from the sad realities around them. A few fatal glasses of claret served to impart to the countenance of my husband a factitious lustre, long banished thence. Sheridan had his merry tale to tell of the royal sailor, young Prince William, who, following the example of his elder brothers, had fallen into debt and love, and been kidnapped out of the way of mischief into the command of the Andromeda, on the West-India station, or rather out of what Sheridan was pleased

to call "the way to *Wynne* him." He had his anecdotes, too, of the Steyne, with its smock-races of Sussex Atalantas, to supply laughter to the prince and a betting-book to Lord Barrymore; and the marine exploits of his royal highness, who, accompanying the Marquis de Conflans to the packet in which he was about to sail for France, dragged the hydrophobic Frenchman through wind and tide, into full fathom two of salt water!

These idle details of still idler practices were related with so much whim and drollery, that we laughed heartily at Sheridan's recitals. None who could have seen my husband that evening, would have suspected him to be on the brink of the grave; none who could have listened to the mirth of his miserable wife, would have suspected that her heart was breaking!

Next day, Fitzirnham was confined to his bed, with an accession of fever. The excess of the preceding night, and a slight cold caught in bidding Sheridan adieu, while the hall-door stood open to admit the night air, hung heavily upon him. His voice was reduced to a hoarse whisper, and his eyes seemed to burn with unnatural brilliancy. Stationed by his bedside, I watched his snatches of restless slumber, and listened to murmured ejaculations of delirious excitement.

"No, no!" he faltered; "the first exercise of your paternal authority over me must not be the interdiction of our marriage. Miss Mordaunt is good—pure—innocent; you have been deceived by one far less innocent—less pure. The letter was none of hers—the letter was for the duchess! *Lizzy*, the paramour of Lord Pembury? Look at home—look nearer to you—look nearer, I say—look nearest! The child is the child of Lord Pembury—let the duchess deny it if she dare!" Then, seizing my arm, as I leant over and strove to tranquillize him, he bade me remove those hateful pistols, and wipe away that stream of blood; that he had murdered his father—that he had murdered the Duke of Rochester!

Much as I dreaded to expose his condition to observation, I sent that night for Warren; a man too kind to resent our former ungraciousness, but too sincerely interested for Fitzirnham, not to reprove me severely for the course we had been pursuing.

"I prescribed rest," said he; "I insisted on quiet and

temperance; and this man has been sitting up—reading, working, talking, wine-drinking—all acts of madness in his present state. The little hope I saw grounds to cherish, is extinct; but if you love him, and I see and know you do, remove from him as far as possible all causes of excitement. I will not answer for the consequences of any shock or agitation."

All that night, Fitzirnham's mind was rambling—his frame fevered. All that night I watched by his pillow, listening to every breath he drew; and trembling lest I should discern increase of perturbation. But, alas! no sooner did morning dawn, than there were loud voices in the hall—voices of angry creditors, which I knew brought death to Fitzirnham. I flew down in my dressing gown—hoping to pacify the disturbance; and addressed them, intreating indulgence.

They threatened—for they saw the state of terror to which I was reduced. From arrest my husband was secured as a member of parliament; but they talked of an execution, and in a tone calculated to reach the ear of the victim.

A happy thought struck me. I hastened to place in the hands of the roughest of my menacers, the valuable set of pearls presented to me by my father, and every other trinket in my possession.

"I do not want these—I want my money," said the man, softened or ashamed. "Every honest tradesman wants his money. I have a family of my own to whom I must do justice. But, since you seem desirous to see me righted, promise me on your own account that my claim shall be paid at Christmas, and I will desist from all legal proceedings."

Christmas was still a month distant. I promised—my word was accepted. I accompanied the men to the street door. I longed to see them quit the house, and assure myself that no danger of further interruption existed. All the pride of Lizzy of Spetchingley was past and forgotten. I would willingly have sat the whole of that day upon the door steps, so I could have insured unmolested tranquillity to Fitzirnham.

But measures for immediate relief were indispensable. Fitzirnham lay insensible on a bed that might be his death-bed; and I had not ten guineas in the house to meet the

exigencies of the moment! Tradesmen were clamorous; servants insolent. My sacred promises to my husband to refrain from applying to my family, extended expressly to my brothers and sisters, and Lady Lavinia; there had been no mention of Algernon—Algernon, whom at any other time I should have shrunk from addressing. But, with a dying husband before my eyes, how could I hesitate?

A fortnight, however, must elapse, before I could receive an answer to the letter. For that period, I trusted I was safe;—and it was no small comfort when, in the course of the following evening, Fitzirnham in waking from a long and refreshing sleep, appeared completely sensible.

"It is strange," whispered he, after having taken a sedative from my hands, "but throughout this long sleep, I seem to have retrograded into the past. I have lived over again that dreadful interview with the Duke of Rochester, written over again that frantic letter of accusation against the duchess; and again seemed to quit his presence, and set off for the north, to seek at Vere Court the old servant, whom he told me was his confidant and my mother's. But a moment ago, I fancied myself once more overtaken on the road by Algernon Rawborne and brought back to London,—to Rochester House,—to the inquest,—that my presence might free me from the imputation of murder. My heart still thrills within me, Lizzy, as it did when your cousin unfolded that accursed history. Poor Algernon!—What a friend!—What a *man!*—How few such in the world!—And we are fated to see him no more!"

There was a mournful intonation in Fitzirnham's voice, which, united with the consciousness of my recent communication with Algernon, rendered it impossible to reply.

"Lizzy," he continued, taking my hand in his, and turning upon me those wistful eyes, whose expression I can never drive from my remembrance, "when I am gone, you will marry your cousin. Yes, dearest! never deny it—make no promises—no rash vows!—I will not hear them, I will not receive them, Lizzy!—You will marry Algernon, and be happy. Happiness, dearly as I have loved you, was not for *us;* happiness is incompatible with poverty. From the day of our marriage, my thoughts have been of gain—of thrift; not for my own sake, dearest wife, but yours. For this I have often renounced your beloved society—have re-

nounced the warmest inclinations of my heart—have sacrificed my time—have withered my constitution. And how has it all availed?—What place—what pleasures have I been able to assign in society to her who ought to have been its queen?—My sweet wife! it is the sense of these mortifications that has undone me,—that has made my bread bitter and my pillow sleepless. And now I die—still young—the promises of the world unfulfilled—the civic crown almost within my grasp; knowing that with another you will taste those sweets of prosperity which to me it was denied to offer!"

With mere protestations I would not have presumed to check the outpourings of that noble heart; but I had a right to say, "And *who* will make so vast a sacrifice for my sake as he who refused the benefits of the Duke of Rochester, when offered as a bribe for the renunciation of my hand!—"

"Say rather, who sacrificed the peace of mind of his father, to vindicate your honour!" murmured the feeble sufferer. "Lizzy! I better estimate *now* the feelings of a husband. I should not now have courage to redress even *your* honour at such a cost! I knew not then that there was death in such revelations."

"No more of this," said I, laying my hand upon his lips. "I have Warren's orders that there shall be no agitation in the sick-room he has placed under my control. I remain here this night by your side, only on condition that you recur to no afflicting reminiscences."

"Have I any thing more cheering in *prospect?*" was his reply. "Death is drawing near unto me; yet near as it is, fearful troubles may intervene. To-morrow may bring sheriffs' officers into this house. Lizzy—help me to rise—help me to draw my writing-table to the fire. I am strong enough to work—I—"

And, in attempting only to raise himself from his pillow, he fell back exhausted.

"Give me something to support me, dearest!" said he. "Give me opium. I have had recourse to it before, when my anguish became insupportable."

"You will never have it from *me*," said I, pressing his fevered hand to my bosom, and bathing it with tears. "You must rest—you must sleep. It is night, Fitzirnham;—all the world is asleep. Why should you—an ailing, suffering man—exempt yourself from the general blessing?"

"Because in my labour is your life—your sustenance!—My funds are exhausted. I have no money for you, Lizzy—I have—"

"Unless you desist from these torturing allusions, I must tear myself from your side," said I, almost frantic with terror at witnessing his excitement. "Be calm—be composed. All is well. I *have* money. I have stores unsuspected of yourself. I own it with shame, I have been a hoarder; I have enough for all our present needs."

"God be thanked!" ejaculated Fitzirnham, faintly, while the tears rolled slowly down his wan cheeks. "Then, in peace of conscience, I may enjoy a night's rest." And, in less than half an hour, his feeble head was lying on my arm, absorbed in profound repose. Oh! how I gloried in the success of my first bold breach of truth!

But when Warren visited him the following day, his keener eye discerned no subject for gratulation in the altered aspect of his patient; and, taking me aside, he bade me, if Fitzirnham had any affairs needing arrangement, to lose no time in providing him with professional assistance.

"He must die, then?" said I, pouring my whole soul into the inquiring glance fixed upon the face of him in whose hands was my destiny;—"he must die?"

"His danger, I confess, is imminent,—the change must be visible to yourself."

"But *must* he die?—Do not trifle with me,—do not measure your expressions!—When my child was expiring, you and others strove to cheer me to the last moment with flattering promises. Do not deceive me *now*. Answer me, Doctor. Look me in the face and answer me,—*will he die?*"

"He *will!*"—replied the good man,—folding my hands in his;—"but on yourself depends the mode and moment of the event. Exercise all your self-command; or the sight of such uncontrolled sorrow as I am now witnessing, will hasten the event and embitter the last moments you have to spend together."

They were numbered, then, those moments,—I dared not inquire to how limited a span!—I could not trust myself to hear how small the measure yet assigned me of happiness on earth.

"Lizzy!" murmured Fitzirnham, calling me to him, after Warren's departure, "let not the jargon of these peo-

ple deceive you. If they tell you, as they do *me* that I am better, they do you wrong. Be not mistaken. I have not many days to live."

"You say this only to ascertain the extent of your empire over my feelings," said I, succeeding in bringing into my face a smile intended to deceive him. "You shall not alarm me, dearest, when there are no grounds for alarm." And, while I spoke thus cheerfully, my eyes fell upon his altered face; and the contrast it afforded to the cheerfulness of my words struck me with so deep a sense of anguish, that I had scarcely time to escape from the room to conceal my struggling sobs. I came back to watch by him,—to weep beside him with a more subdued sorrow:—to tell him the hour of the night which again and again he demanded—*not* with the peevishness of sickness, not with weariness,—but with the deep consciousness that the moments were passing from us—*our* moments; that *he* within a few short hours would be beyond the reach of human suffering,—and I—a grieving widow,—helpless, lonely—poor!

"Morning at last!"—he faltered, when the cold gray straggling light of a winter's day broke into his chamber.

"How cheerless,—how dreary!—I had always wished to part from the world in summer,—to take my last view of it with a smile upon its face. I hoped that in every returning season of flowers and sunshine, my friends would be reminded of my departure. But even this, Lizzy, is denied me. When the cheerless winter comes again you will say—it was thus the wind howled,—thus cold—thus desolate was the weather, when he died! Do not weep, my own love!—do not weep, wife, whom I would fain have made happy, rich, great,—do not weep!—Could I have survived but one short year—nay, but a few months, I might at least have bequeathed you an honourable memory. But I have laboured in vain;—I shall have lived only to be forgotten.—No! bid me not be silent, Lizzy; waste not your intreaties in bidding me be silent. I *must* speak now,—now at the eleventh hour preceding the everlasting midnight of the grave."

But, alas! nature's admonishments were sterner than mine. Exhaustion soon suppressed even the ramblings of fever. It was not till after a long gasping pause that he added in a solemn tone—"God is merciful, my own dear wife. God deals not with his creatures as they deal with

each other. Deep are my self-accusations—of wasted hours, —talents unimproved,—means that should have ministered to the good of my fellow-creatures wantonly squandered;—yet great as are these offences, greater still is my reliance on the patience and long-suffering of the Almighty. My feet that have been wandering by the way-side, will find rest at last."

I pressed his cold hand to my eyes—my heart.

"The struggle of parting life may be a hard one," he added in a still fainter voice; "mortal anguish may overcome me. But solace yourself hereafter with the knowledge that my sufferings were of the flesh; and that hope and reverence are in my soul!"

I seized the opportunity to suggest the attendance of abler and more authorised comforters than myself. He looked earnestly and in silence upon me for some minutes, as if studying the motives of my request, or perhaps examining his own state of worthiness to receive spiritual comfort. But, at that moment, a strange voice sounded indistinctly from below; and, trembling lest it should meet his ear, I summoned his usual attendant, and hastily quitted the room.

Yes—it was as I feared! In the hall was a lawyer's clerk, struggling with the servant for admittance, and insisting on an interview with Mr. Fitzirnham.

"You cannot see him to-day," said I, striving to appear composed, lest he should suspect the urgency of the case and become more peremptory. "Mr. Fitzirnham is seriously ill."

"The more necessary that I should speak to him directly," cried the man, raising his voice.

"Impossible!" said I. "The physicians have forbidden him to enter into any kind of business."

"I tell you there are some sorts of business that must take their course, in spite of the doctors!" cried the clerk, evidently misled by my disordered dress and haggard looks, into mistaking me for a servant of the house; "and so you may find before you are much older. Do just step up to your master, and tell him without preamble that"—

"Hush—hush—lower, I intreat you!" cried I; "Mr. Fitzirnham will hear you."

"The sooner the better. No need of keeping my business a secret," he exclaimed, in a still louder key—"let the whole house hear me."

A bell rang violently in the room above.

"I beseech—I implore you," said I, "be patient. All I ask is that Mr. Fitzirnham's last moments may not be disturbed. You shall have all of which we are possessed."

"Do I speak, then, to Mrs. Fitzirnham?" demanded the man, removing his hat.

"You do—pray do not detain me!" cried I—for, as I opened the dining-room to admit him to a more confidential interview, the bell of Fitzirnham's room was again and still more violently rung. "I will give up all my rights—you shall have every thing. Only quit the house, and let me go to my dying husband."

"You mistake me, madam, altogether," replied the young man, now assuming a respectful tone, while his face betrayed extreme emotion. "I am employed by Mr. Fitzirnham's solicitors to acquaint him, that an ulterior will of the late Duke of Rochester has come to light, fully establishing his claim to a legacy of thirty thousand pounds; and we are instructed by Lord Hugh de Vere, to apprise our client that he is prepared as executor to"—

I heard no more. Again the bell rung furiously. The servant, who had already rushed up stairs to answer the summons of the nurse, met me with a look of dismay on the landing place. A strong smell of vinegar struck me as I entered the room. The servants were busy round the bed. The sheets were stained with blood!

"Gently—gently; raise his head—give him air!" were the first faint words that met my ear. "How could you let that noise keep on below! it was in the agitation of trying to follow my mistress that he burst the blood vessel!" exclaimed the nurse.

I staggered to the bedside. Fitzirnham's eyes were fixed—but he was still sensible; he knew me as I fell on my knees by his bedside, and prayed aloud for mercy.

But it was a look of distress—of despair—with which he recognised me. I had no thought *then* to tell him of our change of fortunes. He felt his soul departing—he felt that he was leaving me—leaving me to trouble—*to want!* One deep—deep sigh——

"Gone!" cried I, almost maddened when I saw the nurse, with an unmoved countenance, close those eyes—those eyes of tenderness and love. "Oh! no—not, not gone—not gone now that our troubles are over! Come

back to me—my companion, my friend—my husband! Listen to me—hear me!"——

But he heard me not—he was never to hear me more. And, throwing myself beside him, I clung convulsively to the form no longer conscious of my anguish—my endearments—my despair!

CHAPTER IV.

For some time, total insensibility afforded a relief to my sufferings; but consciousness came at last—and I was alone—alone in the world! It was already night, for the room in which I had been placed was closed, and lights were burning. A vague idea beset my bewildered mind, of duties to be fulfilled—of orders to be given. But I had been forestalled. Ere I could attempt to rise, a stranger entered my room—a stranger of grave aspect who had installed himself with authority under my roof; and, as he approached and the light fell on his distorted form and benignant countenance, I recognised Lord Hugh de Vere!

"I should have been in this house before—I feel it—I own it; but it is not too late to atone my faults," said he, taking me tenderly by the hand. "On learning from the person who visited you this morning the fate of my brother's son, I remembered amid many unavailing regrets that there yet survived one who was dear to him, to whom justice might be rendered. I am here, my dear Mrs. Fitzirnham, to fulfill your orders. Tell me! how can I assist you?"

"Let me go to him—I want to look on him again!" was all I could reply.

"You are not yet prepared for such an effort!"

"I am—I am! It will give me strength and courage. I *must* look on him again!" I repeated—wringing my hands when it occurred to me that officious friends might have already rendered it impossible.

"They have taken him from me for ever!" cried I, frantic with the apprehension.

"No, no! Compose yourself, and you shall see him," replied Lord Hugh; and, supporting me with the tenderness of a father, he led me into the cold, silent chamber, set forth in the fearful array of death—I did not weep a single tear at the sight. I did not utter a single cry. I felt not as if approaching the husband whom I loved! I

was in the presence of the sanctified, the immortal! I removed the sheet; and, not daring to look upon the face of the dead, took into my bosom that hand—that cold, listless hand of clay, whose fervent clasp had been so dearly mine—that hand which had sought my own in wedded faith—that hand which had so truly redeemed every pledge offered at the altar—which had sustained me—laboured for me—No! oh, no! I cannot write of this!

I laid down my head at his feet! It was not mere affection that thrilled through my soul; it was veneration—a more than religious reverence. Lord Hugh at length approached the bed, terrified by my silence and immobility.

"Fear not to look upon him," said he, gently raising my head, and removing the handkerchief from those beloved features, in the hope of drawing forth my tears. But on the first glance, a shriek burst from my bosom. That cold, calm, passionless face, so changed from the bright, vivid countenance of my beloved, seemed to apprise me for the first time that he was lost to me for ever!

"Behold!" cried I, wildly snatching the hand of Lord Hugh, and no longer restrained by my former feelings. "Look at that tranquil smile—that fixed smile—that happy smile of perfect peace. Yet he died in distress—he died in despair, yes! in despair; harassed by creditors—threatened with destitution! Cast off by the family of his father—renouncing that on which he felt his claims to be supposititious, Fitzirnham had none to whom to turn for aid—and you come to relent over his remains!"

"The hand of God hath been in this!" said Lord Hugh, in a solemn voice. "But yesterday did the last letter of my brother come to light, unmasking the intrigues of the duchess—proclaiming the illegitimacy of the child she was to bring forth—securing a provision for your husband, and commanding me to undertake towards him the *part of a father*. It was already too late. God hath done this, even that jealous God, who willeth not that the marriage vows spoken at his holy altar, shall be spoken in vain!"

"Hush—hush!" said I. "This is no place to speak of such things!" It seemed as if allusion to this hateful subject might yet impart a pang to Fitzirnham!

The first question referred to me by Lord Hugh de Vere, regarded the place of sepulture of his nephew.

"If it would afford you satisfaction to have him lie with the De Veres," he began—

"Never" was my reply. "While yet he breathed, their affection would have soothed his wounded feelings. They threw him off—*him*—so much an honour to their race. It would but provoke idle inquiries were they now to extend their arms to welcome a corpse."

A testamentary paper was found in his desk, bequeathing all and every thing he possessed to myself—even the choice of his grave! I recollected that at a time when we were so poor that the concession was indeed a great one, he had acceded to my request that our infant should be laid at Spetchingley; and thither I now desired he might be carried. I could not have borne that Fitzirnham should be buried in London—in London, where there are neither tears nor recollections for the dead. Lord Hugh insisted on bearing me company in the mournful ceremony; and, in the depth of frost and snow—on a stormy night in January, we reached the old hall, where the funeral was to rest for the night—the desolate, deserted hall—now only too aptly fitted for so melancholy a purpose.

What a return home!—What a welcome to Spetchingley! —I had so often talked with Fitzirnham, anticipating the day when we should visit the place together, and explore the beloved haunts of my youth!—And now all was over! I *had* brought down my husband to Spetchingley; and it was to lay him in the sepulchre of my fathers! They placed the coffin in the great drawing-room—the room where, in my happy childhood, I had frolicked at my mother's feet; and now I was kneeling there a widow, beside the silent solemn coffin of my husband!

My heart, in that hour of darkness, was not as it should have been. There was nothing humble—nothing submissive in my grief. I arraigned the goodness of God; I felt that we had been too hardly dealt with! Fitzirnham, so good—so noble; so fitted to be an ornament to human nature, had been tortured into the grave and was mocked with riches showered upon his senseless remains. All he had suffered—all he had resigned—all he had deserved, recurred to my mind; until bitterness and upbraiding mingled with my widow's tears.

I watched all night. The morning came, that was to lay him in the grave.—I went down into the vault; I chose a

place for him beside our babe, at the feet of my mother.—I knelt down and said farewell—and left him there—and went back into the breathing world alone—*Alone!*

How was it all?—I seem to struggle with my recollections! I have an indistinct consciousness that three persons descended into the vault: the widow—Lord Hugh, who attended as chief mourner—and Richard Mordaunt, the priest who officiated in the last rites. But there was a fourth, whose arm sustained me in ascending those dark damp steps—one who, enfolded in a mourning cloak, had stood overwhelmed with undissembled sorrow, to listen to the solemn service.

No matter?—*Whose* presence or whose absence could grieve or afflict me now?—*His* voice was silenced—*his* smile was darkened—*his* bright aspirings were extinguished!—I had nothing left to love or live for. I was alone in the world!

CHAPTER V.

Five years passed slowly away, and I was still a widow;—a widow of six-and-twenty years according to computation of time—of sixty, according to the amount of sorrow and suffering. I was rich beyond the utmost dreams of my ambition, and not a member of my family but was basking in the sunshine of prosperity.

To my desolate home in Chesterfield Street, Lord Hugh De Vere never permitted me to return. He took me to his house and home as his adopted daughter, and even bestowed upon me as his heiress by legal right, the name of De Vere.

"You are weary of the follies of the world," said he, when, after a month's sojourn at Penderels, I talked of returning to town. "Like the dove of Scripture, you have sought rest for your foot, and found none. But, if seclusion and the dulness of a valetudinarian's life do not alarm you, remain at Penderels, and comfort the remnant of my few days, as it was my hope your husband would have done."

Lord Hugh had other motives than those of mere humanity for desiring my society. The documents left by the late duke, though adequate to establish all they tended to assert, in the mind of his own brother, were insufficient for any legal purpose. A jury had recorded that the duke was suffering under mental derangement at the period of writing his testamentary letter. It was thus finally invalidated; but the case was sufficiently strong to admit of being placed at the disposal of a court of law; and the duchess, rather than venture the exposure, submitted to a compromise. To preserve her son from degradation in the eyes of the world, she consented that her daughters should pass six months of the year under the roof of their uncle—their infirm isolated uncle—who clung with feelings of the deepest tenderness to all that remained to him of his brother.

And thus, while it was important to secure as a companion fitted to preside over the society of his nieces, one

against whom the duchess could raise no personal objection, their annual visit to Penderels became to myself a source of the deepest enjoyment; for I cherished in those lovely girls at once the nieces of my mother and the sisters of Fitzirnham.

Into the presence of Lord Hugh, the Duchess of Rochester never dreamed of intruding. She was too much in his power to provoke animosity which might precipitate her in a moment from her high place in society. The same feeling which had brought her a suppliant to my feet while the inquest on the Duke of Rochester was pending, rendered her patiently subservient to the wishes of her brother-in-law. She had spared neither threat nor entreaty to obtain possession of the letter removed by one of his foreign domestics from the library of the Duke, in the confusion following the discovery of his dreadful end. But the man chose to make sure the payment of his annuity (the only bribe in the power of her Grace to bestow), by retaining possession of the document; and, having imagined or discovered, that she was taking secret measures to effect his removal from England through the Alien Office, he threw himself into the hands of Lord Hugh de Vere, to whom he supposed the secret as much an object of pecuniary value as to the duchess. Alas! had the dispute between these worthy confidantes occurred only a few months earlier, the discovery of their treachery might have been the means of preserving the life of Fitzirnham!

But *his* destiny was otherwise appointed! Fortune came too late—fame came too late. On the trial of Hastings, which presented scarcely two months after his death the opportunity of distinction which would have immortalised his name—the laurels so lavishly gathered by Burke and Sheridan had their root in the labours of Fitzirnham. But who but myself was able to recognise the fact?

"Behold the fruit of *his* vigils—*his* researches!" said I—while reading aloud to Lord Hugh, the details of that memorable trial;—"and far, very far, might the brilliancy of Sheridan and the energy of Burke have been surpassed, had the voice, now silent, been uplifted in that enthusiastic assembly."

But already my pen had dismissed this gloomy period of my early sorrow; already reached the epoch which renewed in the death of my benefactor, my sentence of desolation;

Lord Hugh expired in all the patient sanctity of a Christian vocation; grateful for the happiness I had bestowed on his declining years, and bequeathing to me with the estate of the Penderels and his whole fortune, a recommendation to the Duchess of Rochester to place her daughters as much as possible under my protection.

And thus, at six-and-twenty, I became rich and independent. In Mrs. De Vere of Penderels, no trace remained of Lizzy Mordaunt—still less of Mrs. Fitzirnham. In the one character, I had been wholly self-engrossed—in the other, engrossed by tenderness for another. I was now estranged even from myself, by feelings of misanthropic indifference. I despised the world which bowed at the feet of a Duchess of Rochester; I despised the world which had suffered such a man as Fitzirnham to pass undistinguished through its noisy crowd. The splendid mansions of her Grace were still the resort of the fashionable, the wise, and the witty of the day; and from Isabella and Helena De Vere I found that, still beautiful and holding undivided empire in society, her Grace was surrounded by admirers. The young Duke, just entering his eighth year, was under the care of a private tutor; while the two elder girls, who had been presented at Court the previous season, shared with their mother the homage of the fashionable world. Adeline, Susan, and Maria, still in the school-room, were my frequent guests at Penderels.

But important as were the changes effected in the immediate circle of my family, those of public life bore a far more remarkable character:—France was now a Republic, and the Prince of Wales, a married man; while England—(to borrow the expression of the Indian Chief of the Creek nation in his palaver with Mr. Panton,) had for "years been in confusion and distress, occasioned by *bad talks sent into it.*"

I have lived through momentous epochs of History;—the two French revolutions, and the English revolutionette, for such I cannot help regarding the recent triumph of the Reform Bill. I remember the day when the very word "Revolution" was pronounced with horror, as a type of all that is demoniacal in human action; yet it resumed but yesterday, at the accession of Louis Philippe and William IV, the epithet of "glorious" inherited from the accession of William III!—I have seen the crowns of this and other countries

rise and fall in value like public securities or foreign speculations; and now, sitting with my cat on my knee and my silver hairs gathered under my dowager's coif, I begin to trace effects to their causes; bringing to mind the Right Divine degraded in the eyes of nations by the physical infirmity of one sovereign and the moral infirmity of another; by the tribulation of Windsor Castle, the orgies of Carlton House, the levity of Versailles, and the despotism of the Tuileries. In my youth, the debts of the Prince of Wales with a thousand disgraceful details of their mode of incurrence, occupied the attention of parliament session after session, and engaged the vindication of society to the extinction of every nicer moral distinction. The *great* world was with the best of Kings and his civil list—the *gay* world with the Prince who wore such divine shoe-buckles and sported such "maccaronies" of ponies; and, for a certain period, society loved him, as old Mirabel did his son, the better for his profligacy. But all this produced a re-action.

The French Revolution, like a fearful thunder storm, came to cleanse the air of its impurities. Not alone the King and Queen of France fell under the guillotine, but that wanton Prince, whose money and vengeance had provoked the first outbreak of popular violence, was involved in a sentence, purporting to bring the whole aristocracy to the block. The cause therefore became general, All England,—all Europe,—united against a government whose ends were achievable only by means so ghastly. The patrician world was in a state of dismay; for already the marble tramp of the spectre Retribution was heard approaching its banquet-hall!

The Carlton House party had been the first to dissolve. If its politics were liberal, its prejudices were undeniably aristocratic; and to these the energetic eloquence of Burke so strongly appealed, that thenceforward it seemed to argue want of chivalry to remain on the popular side. "Edmund was right to desert to the royal standard," said Charles Fox, adverting, some years afterwards, to Burke's change of opinion. "Such was his tendency to extremes, that had *he* remained with the people, he would have never rested till he was hanged."

Soon afterwards, the opening of the Scheldt affording pretext for a national quarrel, the Duke of York was dispatched with an army into Holland—Lord Moira having

previously attempted his Quixotic expedition to the coast of France. But all ended ill; and, with the exception of the glorious victory of the first of June achieved by Lord Howe, that epoch is ungraced by trophies of British valour.

But at the period when the close of my mourning re-opened the gates of Penderels to those guests especially recommended to my friendship by the regard of its late lord, the general topic of conversation was the new Princess of Wales; who, wedded at Brunswick to the Earl of Malmesbury as proxy for the prince, was expected in England for the re-solemnisation of her nuptials. Even by those whom the interests of the succession rendered eager for the match, (the union of the Duke and Duchess of York having proved heirless), small was the measure of domestic happiness predicted to the young Princess of Brunswick. An attachment for an officer of high rank belonging to the household of the duke her father, had induced her to refuse the hand of the hereditary prince, afterwards King of Prussia; and, though parental authority and the reported merits and attractions of her cousin, the Prince of Wales at length surmounted her repugnance to the prospect of an English throne, little good was expected from an alliance commencing under such adverse omens.

The *éclat* with which I had seen the Prince of Wales surrounded, had long been tarnished. The withdrawal of his political confidence from Fox, in favour of the heavy, feeble Duke of Portland—his ostracism from the sporting world—and the facility with which he had transferred and re-transferred his affections, stripped his position of its early character of chivalry and romance. He stood before the tribunal of society as a prince starved into matrimony;—wedding against his will and against his judgment, to secure payment for his debts and fresh means for fresh extravagance.

Even the elements seemed to oppose this interalliance in the House of Brunswick. Admiral Payne, who had sailed for the Elbe to receive the royal bride, remained fog-bound on the coast. It was in the interval between the marriage of the Princess and her arrival in England, that I was myself summoned to take my part in a family event, far more interesting to my feelings.

Harry Mordaunt and his wife had been some months settled in England, summoned from Naples by the sudden

demise of Lady Lavinia which placed them in enjoyment of the greater part of her fortune—Lavinia Shanstone having offended her mother by a match with a Jacobite laird of the Roman Catholic persuasion; and my brother thus raised to opulence, had applied for my father's permission to become his tenant at Spetchingley. It was Harry's wish that the whole Mordaunt family should be re-united under his roof, in honour of this installation; and the Ailesforts, and Sir Charles and Lady Rothesbury, with their infant families —Captain Mordaunt, and his new epaulettes—Richard, the portly prebendary, and my solitary self, were to be once more gathered together. I concluded it was in deference to my father's feelings at seeing his son take possession of his birth-right during his lifetime, that I heard no mention of *his* name or that of Mrs. Mordaunt.

Every year since the death of my husband, I had devoted some days to a pilgrimage to his grave, so that the immediate impression of my melancholy journey was in some degree subsiding. I had even found leisure to note with grief, year after year, the dilapidation produced by the prolonged absence of the owners. It was now eight years since the old Hall was abandoned by the family; during which period, profit had formed the sole object of the trustees; and the ornamental department was suffered to run utterly to waste. The summer preceding Lord Hugh's decease, I visited Spetchingley at a moment when the gardens were in all their exuberance of summer blossom; when the lime-trees of the old avenues drooped their unpruned branches on the damp road; when the gumcistus shrubs, forming hillocks of showering bloom, obscured the windows of the sitting-rooms; and the jessamine and the passion-flower, which overgrew the old-fashioned western front, straggling forth in all directions, imparted to the house at a distance, the air of some sylvan monster. The fruit-gardens, as a source of gain, were in perfect order; but the shrubberies and parterres were now a wilderness—the bee and the bird alone remaining to penetrate their abandoned haunts.

These disorders, I naturally concluded, must have been remedied since the return of my brother and sister. It was winter, too, and I could no longer expect to see entanglements of roses connecting the walks into labyrinths; yet, I confess, I was startled on beholding a new and handsome lodge in place of the decaying tenement I had left at the

entrance of the old avenue, and on driving to the hall door, to find that the mansion had undergone complete reparation, subjected to the ancient Elizabethan style of the original structure.

Within, every step increased my delight and surprise. In the hall, beautiful windows of stained glass, perpetuating the armorial bearings of the family, were substituted for the narrow panes; the family pictures had been cleaned and restored, and the whole house, (with the exception of the sacred room known as that of Lady Betty), handsomely and appropriately re-furnished. In one small gallery, my brother had collected portraits of the whole surviving Mordaunt family: among others, Sherwin's sketch of Diana, respecting the giddy Mrs. Fitzirnham, figured on the walls.

Clara, accompanied by her two handsome boys, met me with a smiling countenance in the hall. "Should you find any thing to disapprove in the changes and improvements at Spetchingley," said she, "tell it me, dear Lizzy, when we are alone, and I will see whether it can be remodelled. But do not mortify Harry by a word of censure. For months past, his whole soul has been engaged in completing the restoration of the place; and it would grieve him that even the smallest of his arrangements gave offence in the family."

It was easy to promise compliance, for fastidious indeed must have been the taste that could raise objections: Spetchingley now presented the perfect type of an old English mansion-house, modernised to the utmost luxury of comfort. My two sisters, who were already installed, accompanied us in our tour of the house; and there was only one small suite of rooms situated in what we used to call the nursery-wing, that was closed against our eager examination.

"Harry has the key of those rooms," said my sister-in-law, carelessly. "But you lose nothing. I can answer for it that they contain only old furniture."

It was the last night of the year; and, though tired by our journey, we sat round the fire till a late hour, laughing and chatting,—rallying my brother Alfred on his travellers' wonders and thrice-told tale of the miracles of the first of June; and Sir Charles and Lady Rothesbury, whose marriage was not much more than of a year's date, upon the long continuance of their honey-moon; and, on separating

for the night, Harry made it a request to each, that we should meet him by ten o'clock at the breakfast table, to welcome in the new year together. When I laid my head down that night upon my pillow at Spetchingley, and with my brothers and sisters once more united into a family; how could I refrain from offering up a sacrifice of tears to the memory of him who *should* have been the brightest and happiest of the group; and too painful regrets, that circumstances should forbid my poor old father from presiding over the re-union of his children!

Roused at an early hour by the cheerful village bells, proclaiming the dawn of a new year—a year so auspicious to Spetchingley—I observed, on looking out into the park, that there were more passengers, on foot and horseback, than even the privileged season of hospitality seemed to warrant. I felt persuaded that something unusual was going on; and dressed in haste to be down and questioning among the rest. From the window of the great stairs, however, a spectacle of a novel kind struck me with amazement. Nearly a hundred decently dressed persons were drawn up on either side of the gates of the court-yard, with boughs of holly in their hands; and, as I stood wondering at the meaning of so much ceremony, two horsemen rode up, and took their station at the same point; while beyond, as far as my eye could reach, extended a long line of mounted yeomen, through which I saw advancing a carriage and four, the postillions of which wore the livery of my family. A loud huzza now burst from the assembled crowd; and boughs, and hats, and handkerchiefs were waved, with cries of "Welcome back! Welcome back!"—"Long live 'Squire Mordaunt of Spetchingley."

I flew down to the hall, where my brothers and sisters and their children were already waiting. All but Harry:—my brother had been off at day-break to Leicester, to meet the old man his father, and bring him back in triumph to the seat of his ancestors—every debt discharged—every incumbrance paid off—every arrangement made for him and Mrs. Mordaunt to resume their place at the head of the establishment! Harry and Clara were to be their guests. Nay, in order to remove every feeling of embarrassment on the part of the 'Squire, my brother had accepted the appointment of Minister Plenipotentiary to the court of Sar-

dina, which he intended to hold till the venerable man felt himself once more thoroughly at home.

Never shall I forget the exquisite delight with which I beheld my gray-headed father assisted from the carriage by his excellent son! Not a stranger had been permitted to enter the court-yard, lest the old man's emotions should become a spectacle to the multitude. There was not even a servant in attendance. He was alone with his wife and children, when he fell upon my brother's neck, and wept aloud in joy and thankfulness.

I am wrong. There *was* one individual present who, though not a son, had taken a filial part towards the 'Squire; and when, in visiting every corner of the old mansion, my father noticed that not only Lady Betty's favourite chamber had been respected, but that the snug suite of rooms in the nursery wing was actually fitted up with the furniture from Dick Mordaunt's cottage, while a key, bearing his name and arms, marked him sole proprietor of the little tenement; he laid hold of Harry's hand, with a look such as must have found registry in Heaven, in attestation of the virtues of my brother.

The squire was soon seated in his old favourite library, with Mrs. Mordaunt hanging over his chair, his children round him, and *their* children at his feet; nay! with a fine Snyders-looking hound extended on the hearthrug, who answered to the name of her grandam, "Ladybird." There was young Harry Mordaunt, and young Algernon Mordaunt, and little Lord Clareville, with his sister Lady Elizabeth Ailesfort—and a babe in a flowing mantle, which Lady Rothesbury's anxious face plainly pointed out as hers.

The reverend Richard was making a long set speech of compliment, garnished with quotations, to his brother; while Harry's happy eyes wandered ever and anon to Clara, who looked beautiful with the beauty of perfect happiness, of perfect goodness.

I alone stood somewhat behind the rest. I rejoiced indeed with *their* joy, but mine was imperfect; *I* had no child to present for my father's blessing—no noble son to inherit the virtues of such a race. He whose hand should have been in mine, even as those of the rest were clasped together, was yonder in the cold chancel whose lofty tower was seen through the opening vista. Tears of bitterness started to my eyes at the thought of Fitzirnham.

"Lizzy!" cried the old man, missing me, in the fond fatherly voice of other years, "Where is Lizzy?"

I threw myself into his arms.

"Lizzy!" faltered my father in his now broken voice, while a tear fell from his withered cheek upon my own—"Lady Betty would have been a happy woman had she lived to see this day—a proud woman—a happy woman. But good mothers make good children!

CHAPTER VI.

Henry and his wife were to pass two months in London with their children, previous to their departure for Italy; and, at my brother's earnest desire, I took this opportunity of leaving Penderels, to undergo those repairs which the long indisposition of Lord Hugh had constantly procrastinated, and engaged a house in town for the season. Two quarters of the metropolis I was bent upon avoiding—the neighbourhood of Bedford Square and that of Chesterfield street. My new abode was therefore on the outskirts of London—one of the newly-built houses in Cumberland Place, near Hyde Park.

It was still winter, and in the memory of man so severe a season had not been recorded. The Thames was frozen over. Every week brought tidings of some severe disaster. Yet desolate as was the weather when I reached town, I found it already full of the idle and the gay, awaiting the fêtes which were to follow the arrival of the Princess of Wales. My brother and sister had promised to remain at Spetchingley some weeks longer: and I experienced grievous symptoms of advancing years, in reviewing a circle so broken up by the encroachments of time. Of my former companions, the young and lovely Mrs. Sheridan and her sister Mrs. Tickell were no more; the Duchess of Portland too was gone; Mary M. had been some years married to the Earl of C——, who filled a high command in Ireland, and there, too, was settled Fitzirnham's friend, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, now the husband of Pamela, the daughter of the Duke of Orleans. Lady Elizabeth Howard was divorced—Lady Abercorn dead!—The Devonshire House party, recently returned from the Continent, were not yet established in town for the season. I felt, as most people feel on returning to a spot after a long absence, that things were miserably changed: and willingly, most willingly, would have renounced the five thousand a year and painful remi-

niscenses of Mrs. De Vere, for the fresh and eager feelings of Lizzy Mordaunt, rebelling in her attic against the thrift of Lady Carleton and the impertinence of Mrs. Phillis. I went to visit them in Jermyn Street, by the way, immediately on my arrival; but though the new despotic waiting woman shouted into the ear of the poor infirm creature who sat rolled up by the fireside, my name and errand, the Viscountess looked on me in unrecognising vacuity, and turned for solace to that better comforter of age—her snuff-box!

A few weeks and things began to brighten. I accompanied Mrs. Mordaunt to the drawing room to be presented on her departure for Italy; and soon gathered around me the butterfly-friends of former days; the giddy girls transformed into sober matrons—the sober matrons into artful chaperons—the artful chaperons into nodding dowagers.

Meanwhile, the estrangement between the Duchess of Rochester and myself, was a source of deep regret to my brother Henry—Henry, the unfailing advocate of family concord. Neither he nor any other living being was aware of the exact state of the circumstances attendant on the death of the unfortunate duke, and the position of Fitzirnham; Lord Hugh and myself having judged it essential that family secrets of such moment should be buried with them in the grave. Ignorant therefore of my causes of irritation, he made it a point of friendship towards himself that a reconciliation should take place; and I accordingly accompanied the Mordaunts to a dinner-party at her Grace's magnificent residence in Spring Gardens.

It surprised me that a person so influential and self-important as the duchess, should think it worth while to make overtures for the acquaintance of the insignificant Mrs. De Vere; but with still greater surprise did I observe the advantageous change effected in her manners and appearance. No longer the fluttering affected beauty—no longer the restless woman trying to conceal her frailties from her husband—she was mild, well-bred, unpretending. The young duke remained at Brightelmstone, under the care of a private tutor; her beautiful daughters only were around her, seeming to render even herself more exquisitely beautiful.

"I am happy in the most brilliant prospects for my children," said the duchess to Henry and myself, conversing

with us apart, and at once recognising with the tact of a woman of the world, my determination to banish all memory of the past. "Lady Isabella, who is named as one of the four train-bearers of the Princess of Wales at the approaching ceremony, has the offer of a place as Lady of the bedchamber; and Lady Helena has for some months been addressed by the Duke of Sicignano, the Neapolitan ambassador."

"I wish her joy!" replied my brother. "Sicignano is at the head of one of the most illustrious houses in Sicily. But would you consent to marry her to a foreigner?"

"I am too well experienced in the misery arising from conventional marriages," replied the duchess, gravely, "to oppose my daughter's inclinations. It is rather to Lady Isabella's views that I hesitate in giving my consent. She is scarcely nineteen; and to be enfranchised at that age from a mother's authority without being placed under that of a husband—"

"And in a court such as that of Carlton House is likely to become," I added, carelessly.

"Have you, then, any particular information respecting this new princess?" inquired my aunt.

"It is understood that she is giddy and wilful," said I. "Sir Brook Boothby, when at Brunswick on his official mission, saw her swallow a billet-doux which the duchess, her mother, required her to give up."

"Her manners are, I fancy, at present unformed, and her character feeble and wholly at the disposal of others." observed the dutchess. "Such a woman is scarcely like to obtain ascendancy over the Prince of Wales."

"Particularly when it is so much the interest of others to retain the mastery," added my brother. "But we ought in common charity to hope that a woman likely to be exposed to neglect, may not be too deeply endued with susceptibility of feeling."

"You forget," said the duchess, "that her qualities are essential, as those of our future queen; that *her* influence and example will become of first importance to the country; while *I*," she added with a smile, "am entitled to consider the Princess Caroline with double interest, as the probable friend and companion of my Isabella."

Was all this art, or was it regenerated nature in the duchess

of Rochester?—Was she in reality the gentle noble being she appeared, or only a more accomplished actress?—Hateful uncertainty! I was to live with this woman as a friend, and found it impossible to guess whether she were the greatest of hypocrites or of penitents; for, to *my* mind, the greatest penitent is not the man or woman who grovels on the solitary earth, beating upon his bosom an eternal *mea culpa*, but rather the individual who pursues his appointed career with a purified frame of mind. For the duchess to have made restitution—the only proof of regeneration—was impossible;—the laws of the country did not sanction any avowal disqualifying her son for inheritance. The estates and titles of the house of De Vere, entailed on a remote and only remaining branch, *must* belong to a son born in wedlock, beyond her power of alienation.

What perplexing shadows, alas! are thrown athwart the path of life by our dawning perception of the hypocrisies of our fellow-travellers! From the moment we question within our souls the genuine character of those with whom we are to pass through the world, the choicest portion of our happiness is gone for ever! It is dangerous to be too much a dupe—it is painful to be too much on our guard; and after all our investigations, the nicest discrimination is frequently at fault. An acute observer of human nature has assured us that no two men differ more completely in character than one man from himself, at different epochs of his life; and the same causes produce opposite effects on different dispositions. Success hardens some hearts—softens others; as maternity renders some animals ferocious and some domestic. My best of wisdom did not enable *me* to discern whether the external moralities of my gifted aunt were based upon sterling virtue; and she consequently afforded to my mind a constant source of misgiving and uncertainty.

"I am very good to take her part," observed my sister-in-law, when one day in a fit of feminine gossip I was confiding my doubts to Clara and my sister Helen Ailesfort; "for I still cherish a spite against the duchess for slights inflicted in former days upon Lavinia and myself. However, as I have reason to think that to *her* representations I owe the desertion of my recreant knight and cousin, Lord Rawborne, let my gratitude do her justice! *I*, my dear Lizzy, *have* honest faith in her reformation. How, indeed,

could she help loving those girls, who are beloved by all the world? Every venomous reptile, they say, bears about it an antidote to its poison; the duchess has been a woman of gallantry, but she is rich in maternal affection. When I questioned her yesterday about the young duke, the tears gushed into her eyes."

"Poor woman!" ejaculated Lady Ailesfort, whose heart was full of her own lovely boy.

"The feeling has, perhaps, its source in vanity," said I. "In youth she was vain of her personal attractions; now, she seems to regard nothing but aristocratic distinction."

"It is true, that the duchess asked me a thousand questions about Ailesfort's precedence, and seemed to know twice as much of his family connections as myself," added Helen.

"And when she called in Brook Street, and saw her two grand nephews for the first time," said Clara, "she inquired whether, now the fortunes of the Mordaunt family were re-established by Harry's marriage, he did not think of putting in his claim to the dormant barony of Spetchingley! In short, since our good aunt became mother to a duke, a title seems to have become in her estimation the one thing needful."

"To do her justice," I rejoined, "no one can better extrinsically become her station in life. I find the great world sadly altered for the worse in its tone of representation. There is less of the swan-like dignity of my own day of hoops and minuets; and Lady Augusta Clavering and Lady Charlotte Campbell, in condemning us to the fashion of short waists, have hazarded the loss of half our triumphs. The duchess is almost the only woman left in London who possesses to *grandes manières d'une grande dame;* Lady Sutherland, the Duchess of Devonshire, and Lady Elizabeth Foster are introducing the *laissez-aller* of the Trianon; and all these noble emigrants—these Vaudreuils, and Grammonts, and Montmorencys, infect us with a flightiness of manner foreign to our English nature. A French air sits like affectation upon *us.*"

"Well—well," cried Clara, whose frank good humour liked not to hear blame assigned to others even on trifling points, "we shall all have shortly to mend our manners. I

recollect when every fine gentleman in London modelled himself, from stock to shoe-buckle, on the pattern of the Prince of Wales. The princess, no doubt, will now be equally the rage. It is so easy for such people to become popular! If not absolutely frightful, we shall fall in love with her at first sight; and forget that there ever was a Mrs. Fitzherbert, as the fickle prince seems to have done already."

A few days more, and our curiosity was gratified. The princess, so long delayed, arrived in London, and the marriage was splendidly solemnised in the Chapel Royal of St. James's. It was but natural we should beset Isabella de Vere with inquiries concerning the ceremony in which she bore so prominent a part.

"In the first place—the bride!" cried Clara Mordaunt.

"The Princess of Wales was attired in a white satin train and diamond coronet, and led to the altar by the young Duke of Clarence."

"So much, my dear, the court circular informed us!"—interrupted Clara. "But is she pretty—is she well-mannered?"

"Pretty *enough*—her manners are those of a person over-anxious to please. She talks and laughs too much. His royal highness seems in pain for her.

"And the king?"

"His majesty appears at present to see only the daughter of his sister in his daughter-in-law."

"And is overjoyed to have bribed the prince into matrimony on any terms!" observed Helen. "But the Queen, who is so rigid an upholder of proprieties—how will she like this laughing, talking lady?"

"Not, perhaps, so well as the Mecklenburgh niece she was desirous of making Queen of England," replied Lady Isabella. "Mamma, who saw more of the prince and princess than myself, fears that Lady Jersey has already related things of her that were better passed over. Mrs. Harvey Aston found nothing to tell but traits of her good-nature; but the rest of the household who went to meet her at Greenwich, are whispering about, that while changing her dress at Sir Hugh Palliser's, she conducted herself like a giddy school girl."

"What a shock for the prince, accustomed to the gentle elegance of Mrs. Fitzherbert!"

CHAPTER VII.

Among the most clamorous against the parsimony exercised by the Pitt administration in meeting the difficulties of the heir apparent, was my cousin Lord Rawborne; who, having advanced on the royal bond considerable sums of money, felt profoundly interested in the distresses of his illustrious master.

Stigmatised by the voice of society as being susceptible of only two earthly predilections—love of lucre and love of horseflesh—the Earl of Rawborne was detested at Newmarket as a mule, bred between Scotsman and Jewess; who resorted to the turf as the only speculation in which a nobleman can engage without forfeiture of caste. But as the propensity for field sports forms at least the most manly of weaknesses, his lordship's addiction to the racing-stable came to be accounted a virtue;—and so indeed it was, compared with the meannesses of his system of life. Even with his borough-interest, Lord Rawborne dealt like a broker; nor was he ever known to solicit Government for friend or kinsman, lest the concession should be placed to his account in the balance-sheet of parliamentary business.

In vain did Henry Mordaunt represent to him that his brother Algernon ought to be invited to return from Italy in order to occupy one of the family seats. Lord Rawborne was inflexible. "His brother," he said, "was an oddity, a confirmed eccentric, who in England would draw upon himself the strictures of society: whereas in Italy, where he had chosen to set up his staff, his absurdities were forgiven in favour of his elegant scholarship and profound numismatography."

"So long as Algernon Rawborne can expend a certain number of crowns per annum, and favour the academies of Rome with dissertations on Etruscan vases," added Lord Rawborne, "the Italians will vote him to have the soundest

of heads;—while England might perhaps sentence him to salt bathing and Dr. Willis."

"Inquire of your cousin Lady Craven," replied Henry with indignation, "whether she did not find your brother revered in Italy as a benefactor and friend, rather than flattered as a *dilettante*. His hospitality, it is true, is at the disposal rather of the travelling artist than of lordlings and their bear-leaders; but all Florence can attest—"

"I ask no attestation," said Lord Rawborne coldly. "Algernon has chosen his own career. Your sister Mrs. De Vere inflicted a deep wound on his pride by her rejection of his suit; and he has been concealing the bruises of his soul in a ten years' exile. He is now, I am told, a confirmed old bachelor, a sort of ultramontane Horace Walpole, devoted to nightingales, dowagers, and Dresden china. Now an old bachelor, my dear Henry, is an excellent adjunct to any family; good to lay up stores to preserve its prodigal members from the almshouse. Look at Lord Hugh De Vere, who mouldered through life in single blessedness, in order to bequeath a fortune to the widow or an illegitimate nephew."

"But you are yourself a bachelor; and *one* is enough in so limited a family," replied my brother, not deigning to notice the taunt;—unless indeed you intend your race to become extinct and your name forgotten in public life."

"Let it live in the immortal pages of the Racing Calendar!" cried Lord Rawborne. "But in all cousinly confidence, know that I am waiting till Lady Aldeline De Vere shall be a year or two older, when I may present you with a Countess of Rawborne, without going out of the family."

"Surely Isabella or Helena might have tempted a man less fastidious?" said Harry.

"Sicignano was beforehand with me with Lady Helena; and unless I am much mistaken, Lady Isabella's affections have long been engaged to young Lord Addenbrooke."

"A match likely to gratify the ambition of the duchess?"

"The only son of the Marquess of Kincardine, governor-general of India;—one of the best matches of the day!"

"So much the better; he will have a charming little wife!" cried Henry. "Of all the beauties I have seen since my return from Italy, Lady Isabella strikes me as the most captivating." And the first time we met, Henry related to

Clara Mordaunt, who had accompanied the duchess to Westminster Hall to be present on the great public occasion of delivering judgment on Hastings, that Isabella had whispered her a message for me, heartily thanking me for the good success of my advice. At this trial I had not found courage to be present. The king's illness and other political causes had protracted judgment for a period of eight years; and increasing the expenses of the East-India Company in the defence of their servant, to a sum of seventy thousand pounds. But even this lapse of time had not sufficed to disconnect in my mind, the memory of my husband from those hateful affairs of India, which had been the means of hastening his end.

"And was the duchess in good spirits?" I inquired of my sister-in-law, when she delivered Isabella's message.

"I never saw her so charming," was Clara's reply. "But in truth she had reason to be proud—every eye was upon her and her two daughters—they were the three most striking figures in the hall. William Spencer has lately written some verses about them, which have rendered them objects of general notice; and I assure you, Lizzy, that though the formal salutations of the peers in delivering their several 'Guilty,' or 'Not guilty, upon my honour,' were dedicated to the president, their eyes were far more frequently directed towards the chamberlain's box, in which sat Helena, Isabella, and their mother. Beautiful as we thought Lady Isabella in her bride's-maid's dress, she looked far lovelier to-day in Westminster Hall."

So, too, said the public journals. All London seemed occupied with the surpassing beauty of the Ladies de Vere. Their portraits, the last work finished by Sir Joshua, attracted admiring crowds to the Royal Academy; and when the duchess opened her splendid mansion with a gala in honour of the marriage of the Prince and Princess of Wales, the popularity of the De Vere family was at its zenith. Fêtes were not then in London what they have since become. Dukes of Devonshire or Marquesses of Hertford had not brought us from St. Petersburg or Naples hints for scagliola ball-rooms or blazes of illumination; and Ranelaugh and the Pantheon, which shone so brightly amid the mediocrity of our monotonous entertainments, would now be derided as "total eclipse."

The Rochester fête, however, was an exception. It is

true, that from that ball till the first given by the Regent at Carlton House, not a fête worth recording graced the annals of fashionable life; but neither before nor since have I been struck by so brilliant an exhibition of loveliness, as that which did honour to the gala of the Duchess of Rochester. The celebrated beauties of the Devonshire House set were no longer in the bloom of youth; but in addition to those fixed and still resplendent stars, the Duchess Georgiana, the Ladies Besborough, Melbourne, Elizabeth Monck, Anne Hatton, William Gordon, Asgill, Abercorn, Salisbury, Hugh Seymour, and Haggerston—there was now a younger race of rivals, in the Ladies Conyngham, Lawley, Heathcote, Rous, Cawdor, C. Wrottesley, Oxford, Caroline Villiers, Caroline Spencer, Dalkeith, and Glengall; Mistresses Villiers, Wellesley Pole, Butler Danvers, Harvey Aston; Miss Manners, Miss Sturt—but why venture upon a sad enumeration of those friends and companions who, for the most part, have pressed before me into the grave!

Fairest among them all, however, were my three lovely cousins and their mother—the duchess, arrayed in the matchless diamonds of the house of De Vere and a robe of the richest satin, while dresses of simple white crape with garlands of vine-leaves, did justice to the nymphlike beauty of Helena and Isabella. As they stood, side by side, at the entrance of the great ball-room to welcome their royal highnesses, it was impossible to imagine a more perfect family group.

On that auspicious evening Isabella presented Lord Addenbrooke to me, and Helena her Sicilian duke; the former, an intelligent, manly young Scotsman—the latter, all that youthful poets dream of in the hero of a romance. The two sisters, radiant with youth, prosperity, and beauty—happy in themselves, each other, and the world—seemed to have reached their brightest culmination; and I, who knew the world, and the evanescent nature of its pleasures, could not help whispering to myself what it had been cruelty to breathe within their hearing—"Heaven send that their joys prove permanent! After the brightest day—*midnight!*"

"How satisfied I am," observed my brother Henry, who was on the eve of his departure for Turin, "to leave you all thus gay and prosperous! I scarcely know which to regard as happiest of my sisters—Jane, Helen, or yourself.

After all the troubles of our family, what a perfect rainbow has graced the cessation of the storm! Look even at the duchess, whose rewards are so much beyond her merits; who, at one time, stood on the brink of so frightful a precipice—see how Fortune has smiled even upon *her!* Two of her girls already about to form such noble establishments; while Lady Pembury's death enables her to gratify the first affections of her heart."

"Lady Pembury *dead?*"—murmured I, feeling it necessary to whisper that name under the roof of the Duchess of Rochester.

"Six months ago. How dearly must you love your friends, since they slip out of the world without your knowledge and inquiry. But I forget—she was not *your* friend —she was"—

"Fitzirnham's!—Say on!" cried I, perceiving that my brother hesitated. "Surely even jealousy must find rest in the grave!"

"Jealousy!" retorted Henry, with a smile; "you never could have found it in your heart to become jealous of poor Lady Pembury?"

"De Vere had a sincere attachment for her."—

"A sincere friendship! But had he entertained one grain of affection for his father's ward, pride never would have prevailed as it did to induce him to refuse her hand."

"I begin to think you are practising on my credulity tonight," said I. "Do you mean that the hand of Lady Pembury was ever actually rejected by my husband?"

"Do you pretend that the fact is new to you? No, no, Lizzy!—You *must* have heard from some one among the thousand gossips by whom you lived surrounded, that old Fitzirnham left no means untried to throw his elder son into the society of the heiress of whom he was guardian. But the young lady having boldly declared her preference for De Vere, the young gentleman obtained leave from his father to proceed to the continent; nor did he return to England till the mortified girl had given her hand in *guignon* to Lord Pembury; who, on *his* side, was driven into the match by the repugnance of his parents to his alliance with Lady Harriet Rawborne; yes! the duchess—who is smiling yonder, as if there existed neither love nor hatred in the world!"

"A marriage *de convenance!* What a system for the

promotion of happiness—for the promotion of virtue," cried I. "But how came Fitzirnham to be so cold towards a young and lovely woman, who honoured him with her preference, and had been brought up from childhood in his society?"

"Pride—nothing but pride! I always thought your husband the proudest *man*, as I think *you* Lizzy, the proudest woman of my acquaintance. It was pride, which, forbidding him to disclose his situation to his friends, at length laid him in the grave;—and it was also pride that determined him against a marriage which must have worn so much the appearance of a match of interest, 'I have but twelve thousand pounds,' was poor Fitzirnham's argument—'my father has no right to accept such a *parti* for his ward.' Out of deference for the lady, he left her to become the prey of a libertine like Pembury!"

"This accounts," cried I, thinking aloud, "for Fitzirnham's double resentment against the duchess, and eagerness to preserve Lady Pembury from the follies and dangers of the world. And I—who ought to have aided in his task—how often must I have harassed him by peevish jealousy of one towards whom he was playing a part so noble!"

It was at that moment I noticed, for the first time, a handsome young man—a *very* young—in assiduous attendance upon our fair and noble hostess. My brother could not tell me his name, but having at my request sought the information, I saw an expression of surprise and interest brighten the countenance of Henry at the reply his question elicited.

"Who is he?" I demanded, when Harry returned to me.

"A person whom it accredits my rusticity as a Leicestershire 'squire, and *your* disinterestedness as a young widow, to be acquainted with," answered my brother: "no less a man, in short, than the young Marquis of Mount Hardington, with a princely fortune, and the four finest seats in Great Britian. But though disposed to regard the duchess as one of the most fortunate of her sex, she can scarcely have made a conquest of that Alcibiades of our peerage. The utmost force of his imagination will not remove the fifteen years between them, and I should lose my respect for her sagacity, did I imagine that Pembury would find in this handsome boy a dangerous rival."

"He is, indeed, singularly good-looking."

"By the way, Lizzy how comes it *you* have let such a prize escape you?"

"Because if there are fifteen years between his lordship and my aunt, there must be five between his lordship and myself. At thirty, I am neither likely to attract nor be attracted by a rich marquis of five-and-twenty. Let the mamas and *chaperons* fight for him, and win the day."

At that moment the Duke of Sicignano approached to explain a commission which Henry had undertaken for him in Italy; the transport of some Cape plants, to his sister, Princess of Colonna.

"You will probably see my family in the course of the Autumn," said the duke. "The duchess and Leonora are about to visit my sister at Turin. They will overwhelm you with questions; for my poor mother loves me as all mothers love an only son, and Leonora more than most sisters love, even an only brother."

"I shall assure them I left you in perfect health and perfect happiness. Mrs. Mordaunt admires and venerates the Duchess of Sicignano and your sister more than any one we left at Naples."

"Let me only warn you," continued the duke with a smile, "against betraying my secret to them; or the rival volcanoes of our two Sicilies are mild types of their indignation."

"Your *secret?*" retorted Henry; while Sicignano replied by turning significantly towards the spot where he had left Lady Helena with the duchess, who now stood engaged in conversation with Lord Mount Hardington.

"Not tell your sister that you are happy in the smiles of one of the most charming girls in England?"—cried Henry. "It will require some self-denial not to convey such agreeable intelligence."

"Not agreeable to Leonora," rejoined the duke. "Before I accepted my present appointment, my sister passed nearly a day at my feet imploring me to decline it. You are to know, that I am one of the Predestined!—More than a century ago, some Cagliostro of the day predicted at Palermo that the last heir of the house of Sicignano was to die in a far island of the West; and the Abruzzian vassals of my father having seen fit at my birth to have my nativity cast by their mountain seers, my unfortunate horoscope set forth that I was to die a violent death, and prove the last

Duke of Sicignano. Thereby, indeed, hangs a tale, which they will tell you in Italy; and between these omens and her own presentiments, my dear gentle Leonora would not hear of my accepting a mission to any island in the West. Were she now to learn that my affections are anchored here for life and death, she and the duchess would fly to the feet of the King of Naples, and implore my recall."

"You seem to entertain no alarms?" said I, pleased with the lively frankness of the young lover.

"In Lady Helena's presence, I defy augury," he replied, looking affectionately towards her light figure flying, through the mazes of the dance. "But I confess to you there are moments when, away from the influence of her happy countenance, I so far yield to superstition as to wish she had been born in my own Italy, or at least on the Continent."

"Anything in short but a Western island?"

"Exactly!—May I therefore entreat one of my earliest English friends," said he, again addressing my brother, "to refrain in Italy from all allusion to my present prospects?—At the close of the parliamentary session, I shall obtain leave of absence, and be the first to apprise my family of my attachment. Your brother Alfred, who when at Naples was *l'enfanté de la famille Sicignano*, and constanly at my mother's house, would—such an *étourdi* as he is, have infallibly betrayed me! I assure you I rejoiced to learn that Captain Mordaunt's ship was ordered to the East."

"Rely upon my prudence!" said Henry, accepting his offered hand; "and should the news of your attachment otherwise transpire, I will do my utmost to persuade the Duchess of Sicignano that Vere Court, where Helena was born, stands in Kentucky!"

CHAPTER VIII.

I, too, had my commissions for Italy, but I wanted courage to confide them either to Clara or my brother. I longed to expostulate with Algernon on the waywardness of his proceedings: to represent to him that his friends, his family, his country, had claims upon him still unfulfilled; and to remonstrate against his acclimatising himself permanently in a foreign country.

But I felt conscious of the interpretation such a message might be made to bear. I,—Mrs. De Vere,—rich and independent, might be accused of having summoned to my feet the rejected lover of poor Lizzy Mordaunt; and earnestly as I desired the society of my earliest friend and benefactor, I recollected in time that it was not from myself must proceed his invitation to revisit England.

I sometimes almost wished that Henry and Clara had invited me to accompany them; a project which never entered into their imagination. They thought me wedded to Penderels,—calm, elegant, grassy Penderels, with its tranquil lawns and sunny slopes. But for the last five years, I had scarcely quitted the place. Every tree, every shrub, every glade, every vista, was familiar to my eyes, even to satiety. The happiness I had found there under the protection of my amiable but weak-spirited valetudinarian, had been of a negative nature, the absence of care rather than the presence of enjoyment;—I felt that I should now prefer a wider range of action.

But this weakness did not present itself to the conjectures of my brother; satisfied as he was that the bird whose wings had been broken in snares and whose breast attained by the marksman; was too happy to be safe in its nest at last,—a nest ensconced among the choicest verdure of the grove. Such were the feelings he expressed in bidding me adieu; congratulating himself that as my sisters had their husbands

and children to claim elsewhere their attention, I, at least, could often bestow my society at Spetchingley, and comfort during his absence the declining days of my father.

It was the latter end of May when Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt and their eldest boy took leave of us; on the very day following, a brilliant ball was given by Lady Jersey to the princess of Wales; which, considering the relative position of the parties, called forth universal disapprobation. It was clear to the public, that her royal highness entertained no suspicion of any nearer connection between the prince and her lady in waiting; for it was precisely to the latter she had confided her personal disgusts and girlish satires upon the foibles of her husband. Lady Jersey was the confidante to whom she quizzed his well-powdered ears, resembling those of a Prussian sergeant-major; and even ventured to jest upon the august favoritism of the Frau von Schwellenburg, and other delicate points, which would ill bear that report at Buckingham house to which the courtieress was supposed to have pledged herself. The standers-by, who saw the tendency of the game, formed their conclusions with profound regret; but Mrs. St. Leger, Mrs. Hervey Aston, and others who alone approached her royal highness sufficiently near to put her upon her guard, were women too honourable in their principles and position in society, to become tale-bearers. Acting on the precept of "those whom God hath joined, let not man put asunder," they suffered abuses to proceed, which, in their re-action, produced a still more fatal result.

But a power greater than that of any public tribunal or private influence, exists in England—and of all the civilised countries of Europe, in England only, which, like other potent drugs, becomes bane or antidote—according to its mode of ministration. It is true, that for one cure effected by its sanative qualities, a thousand instances occur where it is turned to poison; and that the personality of the press wings many an envenomed arrow to places unattainable by any other mode of attack. Day after day, accordingly, the squibs of the newspapers attacked the relative position of the prince, his wife, and mistress; till even the royal bride, imperfectly as she was skilled in the English language, was induced to make inquiries and extend her observations, till all became manifest. She appealed to the prince—she insisted on the dismissal of her lady of the bedchamber!

On the 5th of June, I was waiting for madame Le Brun to send home my court-dress, preparatory to my toilet for the drawing-room, when, to my great surprise, the Duchess of Rochester, the renewal of whose acquaintance I had never encouraged to actual intimacy, made her appearance in Cumberland Place in a morning-dress, with her feathers and lappets in readiness for court.

"I am come to consult you, my dear Mrs. De Vere, as one of the truest well-wishers of my girls," said she, "on the strange dilemma in which we find ourselves. About half an hour ago, the princess of Wales refused to suffer lady Jersey to enter her carriage to go to court, and has proceeded to the Queen's house without her. Lady Isabella, who had been attending her royal highness and was to follow in the second carriage, instantly despatched a note to apprise me of what had occurred, and ask my instructions for her own government. I confess I am irresolute what part to take."

"The part, I conclude, most friendly to the Prince," said I; "since it was at his royal highness's entreaty your grace permitted lady Isabella to enter the household."

"Certainly—certainly. But I was then in hopes his royal highness would have guarded against any public *esclandre*."

"Some officious person must have been at the pains of opening the eyes of the princess," said I, intently observing my aunt, whose jealousy of Lady Jersey and her beautiful daughters I had already noticed; "some person who has rendered her royal highness an equivocal service; for ignorance was bliss, and enlightenment will not suffice to strengthen the weaker cause."

"Be that as it may," said the duchess, "the Princess of Wales has now thrown down the gauntlet, and *some* person must take it up; there will henceforth be two parties. It is not for me to consult *my* predilections where the interests of my children are concerned. Tell me, therefore, dear Mrs. De Vere, on which side will it be most to Isabella's advantage to enrol myself?"

"In the cause of the injured," I replied, "if indeed you feel convinced that injury exists."

"Can any one doubt it, after all we have heard and seen of Lady Jersey?" cried my aunt.

"*I* have seen in her only the handsomest woman in a

variety of ball-rooms," I replied; "I hear, or rather read of her in the calumnious newspapers, all that scurrilous ill nature can suggest; as the mistress of the prince, the spy of Buckingham House, and the betrayer of her royal highness. For the love of my sex, I would fain disbelieve these vilenesses."

"Disbelieve as you may, the public has accepted and ratified every word of the report. The Princess of Wales, too, knows the worst. She is a young woman of impetuous character; and as I have myself had occasion to note in our private interviews, inpatient of injury, and likely to insist on reparation. It is probable she will demand the dismissal of Lady Jersey. If refused, she will perhaps appeal to the king."

"Why should you imagine so?" said I, secretly convinced that her grace's machinations were at the bottom of the whole affair.

"From the petulance of her character, aggravated by that incidental to her situation."

"She is likely, then, to give an heir to the throne?"

"Under which circumstances, the king *cannot* withhold his interference."

"Your doubts, then, refer to the eligibility of Isabella's remaining in the household, in the event of Lady Jersey's retirement?"

"Exactly. What do you suppose would be the decision of these Kincardines on such a point? They are said to be people of a rigid code of morality; of the class whose business it has been to canonise his majesty at the expense of his son. Guided in their opinions by the government newspapers, and the disgraceful publicity lately given in parliament to the private affairs of the Prince of Wales, *they* may look upon Carlton House as a den of profligacy. Had I been aware, in short, of Isabella's engagements to Lord Addenbrooke, I would not have consented to her accepting the place; and it strikes me that the event of this morning and the rupture by which it must be followed, present a desirable opportunity for getting out of the scrape."

"And for seeming to give up the princess for her husband," said I, now beginning to see my way through the policy of her grace.

"Not exactly *that!* I fear, however, her impetuosity of

feeling in such as to render the post of partizanship no sinecure. But I am trespassing on your time. You want to dress. I, too, must hasten to finish my toilet. Satisfy my mind first that I am doing a mother's part by my dear Bella, in determining her to resign her situation; and use your own influence to reconcile her to the measure."

"But should Lady Isabella know more than we do of the merits of the case," I persisted, "and consider the princess in the light of an injured person?"

"I should be much surprised were a daughter of mine to form a judgment on such a subject, in opposition to my own," observed the duchess, in a more genuine strain. "I shall meet her at court, and take an opportunity to give her my opinion respecting those she is to hold."

"Do not give it her as *mine!*" said I. "I am still too incompletely versed in the details of the affair to wish to be accepted as umpire."

"We will talk it over, then, another time," said the duchess, rising hurriedly to take leave, when she found it impossible to wring from me a decisive sentence. She had been in hopes I should enable her to say, 'My friend, Mrs. De Vere, (whom poor, dear Lord John was so anxious I should consult in all matters regarding the welfare of the girls), persuaded me it was the duty of Isabella to resign her office.' But I contrived to disappoint her manœuvres.

Next day, all London was busy with the catastrophe!—At court, nothing had generally transpired, save among the two or three to whom the Duchess of Rochester whispered the secret; but neither resignation nor dismissal authorised any active reprisal on the part of her grace. The princess insisted—the prince persisted—Lady Jersey remained; but, as if to evade the scrutiny of the public, which was beginning to deal somewhat unceremoniously with the chief actors of the drama, the royal household proceeded from Carlton House to Brighthelmstone for the summer.

The Stadtholder, driven from his states, was just then the invited guest of the prince; and instead of the flow of wit and display of beauty which in former years graced, under the easy, elegant sway of the lady-like Mrs. Fitzherbert, the society of his royal highness, there were the ill-assorted wrangling couple, who could scarcely keep up in public the farce of conjugal decorum; and the ponderous Dutch prince, whose audible snoring kept time to the orchestra on every

occasion of festivity. Sheridan, when re-admitted, on this occasion, to the favour of the prince, (himself the bridegroom of a second wife,) had need of some courtier practice in order to disguise his amazement at the falling-off of the dramatis personæ of the royal comedy.

Meanwhile, Lord Rawborne having avowed his pretensions to become the husband of Lady Adeline De Vere, I considered it my duty to the memory of her uncle to surmount my aversion, and invite him to my house. Under any other circumstances, I should have refrained; in the double apprehension that he might attribute to myself views upon his coronet, or that my own handsome fortune might draw his speculations towards myself. But I now frequently numbered him among my dinner guests; and it was from him I learnt, *par ricochet*, the opinions and projects of the duchess, with whom, as head of her family, and in some sort her *élève*, Lord Rawborne had always been a favourite.

"Will the duchess visit Brighthelmstone this summer?" I inquired one night, when he gave me his arm in a party I had made with the Townshends to Vauxhall.

"She is to pass the whole season at Vere Court and have the duke there for his holidays," replied he. "After this year, you know, the duchess having only the two younger girls on her hands, will be able to travel; and I should imagine that immediately after her marriage, she will be glad to get away from home."

"Her *marriage!*"—cried I, in amazement! "Is the Duchess of Rochester going to marry again?"

"We conclude that *all* fair widows are going to marry again!" replied Lord Rawborne, affecting a tone of gallantry; "but with respect to the duchess, you know as much of her intentions as I do."

"Indeed I know nothing;—I see her only in general society."

"The very best place for judging the intentions of a woman of the world. The atmosphere of society brings out her feelings, as varnish brings out the colours of a picture. You, my dear Mrs. De Vere,—you, who have served your apprenticeship to the calling—ought to have observed lately in the duchess a sort of popularity-seeking tone of mildness and deprecation, like that of a person on the eve of taking an important step, and canvassing for indulgence."

"Is *that* your only motive for imagining that the duchess is going to be married—and whenever I am less a termagant than usual, do I incur a similar inference?" cried I—laughing at his second-sightedness.

"Exactly!—At this very moment, your tone of saucy defiance convinces me that you have no piece of folly in immediate prospect. With respect to the Duchess of Rochester, as he is now a widower, and she a widow, I cannot imagine that any thing will prevent them from fulfilling the dearest wish of their hearts for the last twenty years."

"*He*, then, standing for Lord Pembury; and not, as I had almost begun to fancy, for Lord Mount Hardington, who has latterly been paying her so much attention?"

"Just as you have seen *me* pay her attention, to conciliate a future mother-in-law."

"But Maria and Susan are much too young to marry? Lord Mount Hardington cannot intend to woo the duchess by proxy, for four years to come!"

"Maria and Susan! Of what are you dreaming?—It is to Lady Helena that Lord Mount Hardington is attached."

"But Lady Helena is engaged to marry the Duke of Sicignano?"

"Not by any means *engaged*. The duchess might have been contented to see her figure, *faute de mieux*, as Neapolitan ambassadress. But the *mieux* has made its appearance in the shape of one of the first English peerages. Mount Hardington is the great match of the day, and a very fine fellow. He bagged four hundred and twenty brace in the first two days' grouse-shooting, last August; and his stud is the most complete thing in England."

"You think that on such temptations, Lady Helena de Vere will change her mind?"

"I judge as in the former case, by inference. Few women, whether for their daughters or themselves, would find courage to refuse Lord Mount Hardington."

"If that be your mode of logic, I look upon the Duke of Sicignano's cause as safe. With respect to the duchess and Lord Pembury, I see no cause that either would have for deprecating the opinion of society. Such a marriage would be an act of atonement."

"In my opinion, it would be an act of execrable folly!" exclaimed Lord Rawborne. "Both are happy, rich, and

independent. Each is connected with the most disagreeable recollections of the other. The match would only serve to refresh the memory of society. Depend on it, they are much better as they are."

Unable to coincide with the feelings of Lord Rawborne, I declined argument and kept my opinion. To me it appeared essential that Lord Pembury should prevent any other man from becoming the father of his son. But the more I ruminated on this painful subject, the more I marvelled at the triumph crowning, even in the most minute particulars, the desires of the Duchess of Rochester. Such a wife—such a mother as she had been!—unprincipled, haughty, reckless, godless; outraging every duty of her sex and her position. The lowest of her handmaidens might have been committed to Bridewell for offences such as hers—the highest in the land had undergone the highest sentence of condemnation, on grounds less valid. A moment had been when disgrace impended over her head as if by a single hair. Yet she had escaped—escaped blameless—escaped with triumph! Every advantage was concentrated in her position which the partiality of the world could bestow. Her daughters had only to appear in society to be sued for by honourable men. She was in favour at Carlton House, and yet uncompromised at Court. Those who stood in her way, seemed to fall and die at the unexpressed wish of her heart. Fitzirnham, the only man cognizant of her treachery, was gone to his grave; Lady Pembury was no more;—even Algernon, with whom it might have been vexatious to her to come in contact, had banished himself to a foreign country, as if to avoid giving her pain.

Was not this success?—was not this triumph?—was not this discouragement to such as walk the world humbly, in the paths of rectitude and virtue?—I began to fancy it was written that the ungodly should prevail!

On this discovery of the views of the duchess and Lord Mount Hardington, however, I felt it a duty to the memory of Lord Hugh De Vere to keep in sight the proceedings of her Grace. I invited her accordingly to visit Penderels, and accepted the invitation I had repeatedly declined to Vere Court. The girls were enchanted at the concession. To both these parties Lord Addenbrooke was to belong; and, as the duchess had probably received no definite proposals

from Lord Mount Hardington, she thought proper to continue her courtesies towards the Duke of Sicignano; whom, having engaged to visit Vere Court in the autumn, it was now clearly impossible to withdraw the invitation.

CHAPTER IX.

HERTFORDSHIRE has always been a gay, sociable county; its lords and ladies being relieved from their farthingales and coats of mail by that close vicinity to the metropolis, which confers general civilisation in exchange for feudal distinctions. Penderels is one of its most favoured spots; situated in a grassy glade between Welwyn and Wade's Mill, and within easy reach of Hatfield; rendered brilliant, at the time of which I write, by the hospitalities of my charming friend the Marchioness of Salisbury; and Panshanger, then inhabited by one of the most amiable of human creatures, the late Lord Cowper, whose early death still affords remembrances of regret to dowagers like myself. Archery was then, as now, the rage. We had our Toxopholite meetings—our Hoo races—our Wheathampstead cricket matches;—while Brocket Hall and Tittenhanger contributed their gay hosts of London visitors to the enlivenment of our sober provinciality.

By these gaieties, the Duchess of Rochester consoled herself for the fortnight her line of policy compelled her to dedicate to the representative of Lord Hugh de Vere. Charles Fox, now domesticated at St. Ann's Hill, happened to be on a visit to the Melbournes; his powers of enlivening and adorning the monotony of lordly life, a thousand fold increased by his estrangement from the jarring world of politics. Disappointments of a public, and vexations of a private nature, had sobered, without embittering his character; and to a heart warm as ever for his friends, and a mind overflowing with the fruits of philosophic culture, he now united a sarcastic playfulness of speech—a polish derived from the hard friction of the world—which imparted a yet more sparkling brilliancy to the diamond of pure water.

"Have you news from Italy?" inquired the duchess of

me one morning, in a careless tone, as we were sauntering together on the lawn of Penderels, after a drive she had taken alone in her phaeton to Panshanger; while I had been introducing the girls and Lord Addenbrooke to the beautiful shrubberies at Woolmers'.

"I heard from Clara about a fortnight ago. Of Henry I exact little as a correspondent, now that his time is engrossed by the cares of diplomatic life."

"I did not allude to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Mordaunt."

"Alfred's ship is not in the Mediterranean squadron. My brother is just now stationed in the East-Indies."

"Yes—I recollect! But *I* alluded to my nephew Algernon."

"Many years have elapsed since I had any intercourse with Mr. Rawborne."

"Not since your marriage, I dare say!" observed the duchess, with a smile almost sarcastic. "Mrs. De Vere must pardon me for remembering the little touch of prudery that sat so well on Lizzy Mordaunt."

"I am glad to see you smile again. I was almost afraid some mischief might have befallen my cousin Algernon," said I, in a reproachful tone.

"No *mischief*—according to *my* idea of the word. He is only desperately in love; and pray allow that after a ten years' constancy it is almost time!"

"Indeed I do!" replied I—trying to speak in a cheerful tone. "But who is the '*bella e gloriosa donna?*' and how has the news reached England? By the telegraph, I conclude, now that Mr. Rawborne's political friends are at the Admiralty."

"No! the report came in a letter to Panshanger, while I was there this morning. The lady of Algernon's roving thoughts is a certain fair countess, of the Visconti family, (a near relative, by the way, of Sicignano,) who arrived last year as a bride at Venice; and has fixed upon the handsome Englishman to be her *cavaliere servante*."

"Is that all? To call her carriage, mill her chocolate, cool her *sorbetti*, preside over her papillotes, air her lap-dog, and draw and undraw the curtains of her opera-box! Such, I believe, is the extent of an Italian *liaison!*" said I—"the last thing in the world likely to provoke my jealousy."

"*Jealousy!*" ejaculated the duchess, affecting to stop

sheet, and regard me with surprise. "You do not actually mean, dear Mrs. de Vere, that you are capable of feeling jealous of a man whom you have frowned upon any time these ten years; and who need only be summoned by a beckoning gesture, to come and deposit his burthen of tender woes at your feet?"

"Forsaking even those of the Countess Visconti?"

"Ah! I had forgotten the Visconti; which I fancy is more than Algernon is likely to do—at present. The letter Lord Cowper read me from Florence, stated that poor Rawborne played the part of *patito* with the utmost patience; *pas possible* for any poor creature to be more infatuatedly in love!"

"*Je lui en fais mon compliment*," said I, with affected superiority. "A man must be especially favoured, whose heart, at Algernon's age, is fresh enough to be *infatuated* about any thing—even a Milanese Countess. *Mine*, alas! has been turned to clay; and I could as easily fall in love, as resume my bib and tucker, and nursery supper of *soupe au lait*."

"I would no more pique myself on inaptitude to fall in love, than to catch the small-pox," said the duchess. "Let the infection arise, and, to borrow the style historical, it spares neither sex nor age. When I first visited Paris, there was dear old madame du Deffand, a miracle of wit and good sense (that rarest of combinations!)—as schoolgirlishly in love with my friend Horace Walpole, as Algernon is said to be with madame di Visconti. And have we not all seen poor dear Mrs. Montagu sighing like a grey turtledove for poor dear lord Lyttleton; and the withered Duchesse de Piennes apprising the Brighton watchmen, that the man getting in at the window was not a housebreaker, but a Romeo?"

"You find illustrious examples to smooth my way to folly," said I, "but I must be allowed to remain an exception. A rose tree has an excuse for withering, whose roots are entangled in a tomb."

"You remind me, my dear niece, of my friend Curran—who swears that when he can no longer talk sense, he talks metaphor. *Croyez moi*—chooseyour emblem in the ivy; which, though hanging over ruins, continues to put forth new shoots of verdure."

Luckily, I recollected that my remarks might seem to

convey censure upon her own projected marriage with Lord Pembury; and Lady Helena approaching us at the moment, I turned my conversation to Woolmers and the Colne, profiting by the first break to escape to the solitary haunt of my favourite little flower garden, to muse and to bemoan myself.

Algernon, then, was at last lost to me!—lost, at the very moment I was beginning to discover the vast happiness that would be added to my life by a renewal of our friendship. The position in which he stood towards me as a benefactor, had solely produced my original insensibility. I was now the superior in fortune, and above all suspicion of interested motives in the avowal of my affection for my cousin. No companion suited me half so well. To none other could I confide my feelings—my regrets; or rather, to none other was it unnecessary to confide them, since he was familiar with every detail of my life—every secret fold of my heart. It has been said that the long constancy of Pope to Martha Blount consisted in a similar coincidence; that the mind of each was reflected on the mind of the other. It becomes, in fact, too severe an effort to begin anew the task of confidence in order to retrace, shade by shade, the picture of former years. Reserve as I might from myself the avowal, it was to Algernon's eventual return to England I had been looking, to crown and perfect my domestic happiness. I wanted the support of that early friend who had so often snatched me from danger, so often from distress; who would now guide my opinions and indicate the duties of my station. The happiness of Jane and Helen in their several *ménages*, served only to demonstrate to me more forcibly the imperfect nature of my own.

But another had at length usurped the place so long accorded to me—a first place in the affections of the noblest and kindliest of human natures!—Algernon, so slow in yielding himself to Italian fascination, could not have been lightly won, nor would be easily lost. No further hope of his return to England!—Venitianized for life, he would be seen among us no more!—While Lord Rawborne, as head of the family was about to merge his personal insignificance in the responsible station of a husband and a father, Algernon would dwindle down into the puppet of a Milanese countess, living for the mere luxury of life—breathing

among orangeries and operas—an embodied echo to the feeble poetry of enervated Italy!

I began to rejoice that the penance-visit of the duchess to Penderels was nearly at an end. I was eager to be alone with my vexations; and still more eager for the appointed period of meeting Sicignano at Vere Court. The duke was not of our Hertfordshire party. Desirous, like most young foreigners, to acquaint himself with the sporting life of England in its various details, he had accompanied Lord Rawborne to the Moors, for grouse-shooting; and they were to meet in Lancashire the first week in September. Thither the duchess and her daughter preceded us; with the exception of Isabella, who was discharging her duties at the Pavilion. But much as I had wished them gone, the very day after their departure I regretted the loss of the cheerful young voices and affectionate caresses of the girls,—to whom Penderels was a second home, and myself a second mother. I began to discover that the place was dull,—that the views wanted expansion, the river animation. It was August—the summer flowers were gone from the gardens; China-asters and China roses reminded me that Autumn was come, and winter coming;—winter, which I was to pass at Penderels *alone*;—for the first time alone, because for the first time without hope of ultimate companionship.

I was to visit Spetchingley on my way to Vere Court. Before leaving home, I drove over one morning to Brocket. But its gay guests were gone on a fishing excursion to Luton Park; and my coachman having insisted on resting his horses, I had the good fortune to find, in the library, Mr. Fox, who was suffering from a fit of the gout, and Pen Lamb, who had remained behind at Brocket to keep company with the invalid.

"A thousand thanks, fair lady, for your charity to a sick hermit," cried he, understanding that it was for *him* my visit was intended. "You enable me to be peremptory with my young friend, who has been losing his summer's day in order to lend a little sunshine to mine. In vain have I been assuring poor Pen that I had business in hand; and that as 'the labour we delight in physics pain,' I could well afford to pass the day alone. He insists that I am at Brocket to play, not work;—that I left St. Anne's Hill expressly for

the benefit of a holiday. But now you are come, both may yield with a good grace. He has every excuse for going,—and I, every consolation in staying."

Pen Lamb quitted us accordingly, to finish letters for his father for the post; and to find myself sitting alone with Fox in the large cool library, carried me back painfully to days of yore. A tone of conversation light without levity, philosophical without prolixity, classical without pedantry,—but displaying by fits and starts that "scholar's melancholy" which descends with gray hairs upon middle age, deeply affected me. I remembered Charles James Fox, when, twelve years before, at four and thirty, life seemed opening to his hopes as brilliantly, *more* brilliantly, than to those of any man of his day. But now all was dark; the future afforded him no promise,—the present, little pleasure. Nor were his own reminiscenes much more cheering than mine.

"You bring back old times sadly to my mind, dearest Mrs. de Vere," said he, gazing upon me steadfastly as I sat beside him on the sofa. "Instead of the meridian brightness of early girlhood I once saw radiant in your face, I find the mild sober sweetness of evening. For my part," continued he, with one of his benignant smiles, "I find the leaves dropping from my own tree of life, and leaving it, like Timon's——

'Bare to every storm that blows!'

"After a certain period of human life," said I, "there is consolation in finding one's leaves growing yellow with those of the rest of the grove. The sturdy evergreen, the melancholy cypress, the universal survivor that flourishes proud and exulting in a cemetery, has but a gloomy triumph."

"Most true!—and I, not yet fifty years old, am beginning to apprehend the fate of the cypress! The death of your husband left a weary gap in my existence. The days of Burke and Fitzpatrick are numbered. The Prince," said he, trying to recover his gaiety, "is morally extinct."

"By marriage!"

"No, not by marriage, or what becomes of myself? But not a particle of his idiosyncrasy is identical with the prince of our better days."

"Like me, you augur little of a chivalry of which Sir Sydney is the Bayard, or of a *bureau d'esprit* of which John Doyle is the George Selwyn."

"We will not trouble ourselves with such small particulars," continued Fox, with a still more significant smile. "But I regret that the daughter of my poor dear friend, Lord John, (that best of noble fellows, whose wretched end I have never ceased to lament!) should be entangled in such a labryinth of dirty holes and corners as the Pavilion now presents. They are beginning to whisper the most pitiful histories of listening at doors, and prying into letters! Jersey ought to put an end to it all; for on the birth of an heir presumptive, this unfortunate young woman, the princess, who seems to have been beguiled hither only to be made ridiculous and unhappy, may be induced to claim the protection of his Majesty in a tone to make the appeal audible to the nation."

"Lady Isabella will soon have a pretext for resigning, on her marriage with Lord Addenbrooke," said I. "I shall be glad to know her safe on shore before the outburst of the storm."

"Lord Addenbrooke?—aha!—And what do the Kincardines say to their son and heir fixing himself in the family of the Duchess of Rochester?"

"We are still to learn. —— The next fleet will probably bring their consent."

"I am sorry to hear it is still undecided. I scarcely know such dial-ruled people as the Kincardines. You might raise two marble effigies of some Baron and Baroness of the Middle-ages, off a tomb in Westminister Abbey, and infuse more life and humanity into them, than Kincardine and his wife exhibit in their warmest moments. They are people to have figured with honour at the court of Cromwell,—had Cromwell been Oliver the Tenth, and a Tudor or Plantagenet. Their piety is not love of God, but fear of the devil;—their loyalty not devotion to the king, but contempt of the people. Lord Kincardine would have made a capital archbishop; he missed his vocation in becoming Governor-general."

"But you do not, I trust, imagine that he will oppose the wishes of Lord Addenbrooke?"

"Imagine?—yes! I do imagine that nothing is more like-

ly than for him to object to a connection with the duchess. But it is a mere act of imagination. I have no grounds for believing it, further than the horror manifested by that holy army of martyrs—the prudes—against the widow of the unfortunate Duke of Rochester. But twelve years' atonement, by good and prudent conduct, *ought* to go far in propitiating the ferocity of the fiercest dragon of Virtue!—And now tell me something of my excellent friend Rawborne?"—

"He is on the Moors, as usual at this season."

"How!—returned to England?"—

"Ah! you are speaking of my cousin Algernon ——"

"Of whom else?—You don't suppose I have a sentiment in common with that animated betting-book, his brother?—Smile and welcome! I plead guilty to love of play, as one among the excitements of conventional life. But I detest your gambling sportsman trafficking in horseflesh,—as an epicure abhors a glutton."

"Yet there *is* a sentiment you would not blush to entertain in common with him," said I. "Lord Rawborne is in love with one of the duchess's charming daughters."

"And she is going to make a sacrifice of her girl to the monster?"

"She is going to make her Countess of Rawborne. But Lady Adeline is scarcely seventeen—has seen nothing of the world—her cousin is the only man with whom she is much acquainted, and she marries him without repugnance."

"'*Without repugnance?*'—Why that is identically the phrase of the French! All these finelady emigrants inform me, when I attack their *mariages de convenance*, that they marry and make marry '*without repugnance!*' God! what a system to pursue in the creation of that eternal tie, which extends beyond the limits of the grave! The connection which of all others demands sympathy of soul, thought, feeling, action, principle!"

"You speak with fervour!"

"I speak on all occasions out of the abundance of my heart, or not at all. I speak when I feel—or am silent. On this point I feel deeply. I have sanctioned matches in my own family, and perhaps *demanded* sanction, of which this unanimity of heart and soul offers the sole apology; and bear in mind, dear madam—take it, my dear Mrs. De Vere,

from the lips of a man of nearly half-a-century's experience—that such a marriage is the 'sovereign'st thing on earth,'—the only foretaste of Heaven afforded to poor mortals, as bounty-money to enlist for virtue and the skies!"

"I will lay your lesson to my heart," said I, with a smile, "for the woman's reason, that your philosophy is ratified by my personal experience. But you were speaking of my cousin Algernon. He used to be a favourite with you, and you will hear with regret that he has formed a *liaison*, likely to detain him in Italy for the remainder of his days."

"That cursed Italy!" cried Fox, referring probably to some digust or animosity of his own. "But console yourself!—In Italy the English are not long destined to remain. Unless I am much mistaken, Italy will soon be made the seat of war by these new-fledged republicans of France. In the first place, it affords the only debateable ground on which they are likely to pluck the wings of the Imperial Eagle. Austria would have little chance in the Milanese, against the champions of liberty; and in the states of Genoa and Venice, the people wait but a signal to rise *en masse* against their oligarchical task-masters. The French Republic may have been unlucky on the Rhine—mark my prediction, that it will gather new laurels on the Po."

"Which you think will drive Algernon from Italy?" said I, referring to what my woman's heart regarded as the only important effect of such a cause.

"Of course! When I was there in eighty-eight, I found the population of many of the states ripe for insurrection. The French Revolution has since sent scouring over Europe a drove of Sampson's foxes, with firebrands at their tails, to let fall a spark wherever the fruits of the earth are dried up and ripe for conflagration. My friend Rawborne, with his aristocratic name and presence, his palace on the Brenta and other patrician foibles, may chance to find Venice took hot to hold him when its new Council of Ten shall be composed of Cittadino the butcher, Cittadino Catone the baker, and Cittadino Scævola, the stewer of macaroni."

"By these contempts, you verify the duchess of Gordon's retort to Lord Lauderdale," said I. "But no matter—since you announce my cousin's return, I applaud your inconsistency."

"You have only to *summon* Rawborne to England, to make assurance doubly sure," replied my indulgent friend; and soon afterwards, the Luton party returning, the conversation became general, and my carriage was shortly announced.

A few day afterwards I was at Spetchingley; where the good squire and Mrs. Mordaunt were installed as if they had never quitted the place. My father had now completed three score and fifteen; and, but for the adversity of ten latter years, would probably have remained robust as ever. But his day for field-sports was done. His eye brightened indeed under his brow, when Dick Mordaunt (whom at fifty he regarded as a brisk young fellow not fit to be trusted) regaled him with the details of a good run, or a good day's shooting. But his own occupation was to watch the breaking of a pony, and the progress of some colts destined for little Harry, whom *he* invariably designated "young Mordaunt of Spetchingley." His whole happiness seemed centred in my brother's two boys; the younger of whom, Algernon, had been considerately left by Clara under the care of Mrs. Mordaunt; feeling, perhaps, that the doating grandfather might be tempted to spoil the young heir of his name.

Here, then, too—here in the home of my fathers—I was supplanted;—even here I was but a secondary object!—Aware that his daughter Lizzy was happy in a fine place and fine fortune, my father could not suppose me the least happy of his children, and consequently the most covetous of his tenderness. At length, one day when I returned from the church, my eyes red—my heart full with meditating over the grave of my husband—the old gentleman called me into his library, much as he would have done at fifteen—fifteen years before, and gave me his serious recommendation to marry again!

He cited the comforts of his own domestic life—the happiness of my brothers and sisters.

"There's Harry!" said he, "with that good tender hearted wife of his, who turns pale if he gets but a hedge-thorn out shooting;—such a life of peace and good will as they lead together, she neither knowing nor caring whether the trade-wind blows round his side the house or hers:—happy and obedient as if she had been some Melton or Leicester maids, whom young Mordaunt of Spetchingley had

picked up without a guinea in her pocket. There's Jane, with her good man, as quiet and content at their country-place as two field-mice in a furrow (though I'm told Rothesbury Hall is nothing to mention with Spetchingley—two turnpike roads and a navigable canal right through the park). As to Helen and Lord Ailesfort—to be sure, there would be no pardon for them to be otherwise than content, with forty thousand a-year, a fine old castle, a fine young chap of a lord, and two beautiful babes—thrown at her head, as one may say, when she had scarcely where to lay it. But for *that* luck, Lizzy, she has to thank *you;* and so has her old father—and so he does (all the same though young Ailesfort is as thorough a tailor on horseback as ever crossed a saddle). All these children of mine, God be thanked, are as happy couples as may be, and a pattern in their generation; and, do you know, Liz, they tell me even my son the Prebendary (Dick the Demure as you used to call him—you and Harry—Harry and you were always sad mad-caps when children; Lady Betty, poor dear woman, used to have many a fright about you!)—yes! they tell me, even Richard is going to take a wife—ho! ho! ho!—the eldest daughter of the old Bishop of Litchfield: and, between you and me, Lizzy, it will be lucky if the gray mare don't prove the better horse, for I'm told the bride to be is as gray as a badger;—fine church interest, fine fortune, fine expectations, and forty-five. But 'tis of yourself, my dear girl, I want to talk to you."

I began to fidget in my chair, and to wish that little Algernon, who had the privilege of his grandfather's room, might break in and interrupt a colloquy which I felt persuaded would lead to the subject of my cousin. Nor was I mistaken.

"I don't feel comfortable to see you turned adrift on the wide sea of life, without pilot or convoy, my dear Lizzy," resumed my father, waxing metaphorical as he grew earnest. "It would give me satisfaction to find you happily settled before I go down to the grave;—settled under the care of some fine manly-hearted fellow, who would keep your property together for you, and be company for your long winter evenings yonder in Hertfordshire. In short, Lizzy," he continued, "without going out of your own family, I have my eye on one who has loved you like the apple of his eye

for the last twelve years or more;—who loved you before you ever so much as heard tell of the poor fellow that lies yonder in Spetchingley church.—Ay, ay!—no wonder you blush to hear of it!"

And my poor father indulged in a hearty laugh, which struck me as at least ill-timed.

"Not that I mean to say I would have given you to him when you were Lizzy Mordaunt of Spetchingley, with only your handsome face for your marriage-portion. With a few hundreds a year between you, how could you have got on? And to say truth, my dear, one of the things that reconciled me to the match you chose to make, which was no great things to boast of as times went, was that it put an end to the poor fellow's worryings and heart-burnings, and settled you at once out of his way. But now, you are independent —nay, more than independent—a young widow with a fine jointure and a fine woman still—I'm sure I see no reason why you should not make up a match with your cousin."

"You distress me, my dear father!" I replied. "Whatever might be my views my cousin has other engagements."

"Tu!—tu!—tu!—Not a bit of it!"

"You may believe me, sir!—I assure you, he has formed other engagements."

"Don't believe a word of it! Who told you so?"

"Nothing can be more public."

"That's just the way with the women. Because the poor fellow can't be always sighing and dying at your apron-string, you fancy he must have got another sweetheart.—Why, now, I only ask you—Lizzy, years ago, when you were single—did he ever make much of a lover in the way of courting?"

"Enough to excite a deep interest in my feelings," said I. "And, perhaps, had I never known Fitzirnham—"

"The devil you would," cried my father, anticipating what I was about to say—"then hang me if I ever guessed half as much!—I fancied you couldn't abide him; and I've often as good as told him so!—To be sure, after you went off to London to Lady Carleton, the poor fellow did so mope about the house, going and sitting for hours in the room that used to be yours, that I could not find in my heart to say a harsh word to him about you; and at last, when he started off after you merely for a glance at the house you lived in,

(for he never screwed up courage for a call), what could I do when he came back, but tell him, if times should ever mend with us, he should have my free leave to ask for you and my blessing into the bargain."

"Dick Mordaunt!"—I ejaculated, almost breathless with surprise.

"Yes! Lizzy;—your cousin Dick Mordaunt!" reiterated the old man, "who has been to me as the staff of my old age—and that is a strong word from one, blest with such a son as mine. My companion through all my trouble; south wind or north, Dick was always staunch—always ready to come to call. I've known him go without many a thing he wanted, when money grew scarce among us; for his purse was always more mine than his own."

"I am quite sensible, sir," said I, "of my cousin's great and good qualities; but, not to enter into other objections, the vast difference of age between us—"

"Difference of age?" interruped my father, "what's a matter of twenty years, when it lies on the right side?"

"A serious objection, in my opinion."

"Why where would you find a likelier-looking fellow than Dick, or one who carries his age as well? Last Whitsuntide, when he was over at Leicester for the 'Sizes, there was Lord Harborough and several of the country gentlemen who've known Dick since they were born, swore he wasn't an hour altered for the last twenty years; and I don't suppose there's a bolder rider in this and the next three counties!"

"I grant it all, my dear father; but——"

"But he is not a maccaroni—not a buck—not a beau."

"Mr. Fitzirnham was no maccaroni," said I, in an extenuating tone.

"Then I'm afraid, Lizzy, I counted too much on your moderation; I'm afraid you despise the poor fellow for his poverty."

"So much the contrary, my dear father, that could the sacrifice of a portion of my fortune compensate my cousin for the devotion of his life to our family——"

"No, no, my dear! Dick wants none of your money. 'Tis yourself he has been hankering after from the day you were ten years old. He used to be so proud of you, Lizzy,

—proud even of your pride, as Miss Mordaunt of Spetchingley; but afraid that your sagacity should find him out, and make a butt of his passion, he was always finding fault, and pretending to laugh it off, to put you on a wrong scent."

"He succeeded; I own I never suspected him."

"May be," interrupted my father, struck with a sudden bright idea—"may be, child, 'tis a lord you are looking for? May be this grand match of Helen's has put it out of your head that you are but the daughter of a country squire? Ah! Lizzy, Lizzy! there was always a spice of Rawborne blood in you; and that was the reason your poor dear mother, rest her soul! loved you better than the others. Lady Betty couldn't at all times forget she'd walked at the coronation—didn't she walk? Well, never mind! She was there as an Earl's daughter; and after being an Earl's daughter, 'tis a hard thing to be no better than a 'squire's wife. And the best of wives she was, and best of mothers, And now, what shall I say to poor Dick?"

"Did Mr. Mordaunt commission you, then, to make proposals to me?"

"There or thereabouts, as the saying is."

"I am heartily sorry, sir, to hear it; I could have wished——"

"Ay, ay! I see how 'tis! Enough said—enough said! Well, my dear, I'll soften it to the poor fellow as much as I can. And so, Lizzy, I'll plague you no more about lengthening your stay this time at Spetchingley; 'twill be but vexation to both of you. Off with you, as you settled it at first, to-morrow, to Yorkshire—to Lord Fitzwilliam's, isn't it? And then, away to your duchess aunt. Ah! Lizzy, what chance has a poor Le'stershire fox-hunter among so many lords and ladies!"

I threw myself, as in former years, into his arms.

"A Leicestershire fox-hunter is the first object to me in life," cried I, "when I see him in my father. Forgive me, if I have other fancies in a husband."

"You are a dear dutiful child, like the rest of Lady Betty's children," he replied, laying his withered hand with much emotion on my head. "Be happy in your own way; no fear but 'tis one that will be a credit to your family."

"Farewell, Lizzy!" he added, on taking leave of me the following day. "The next time you visit Spetchingley, ten to one but it will be to lay your father's old bones in the grave!"

CHAPTER X.

I PASSED a delightful week at Wentworth House. That most amiable of human beings, Lord Fitzwilliam, loved me for Fitzirnham's sake, whose unfortunate mother was his distant relation; and it was a happiness to hear the praise of my husband from lips so honourable. It was in virtue of his mother's connections that Fitzirnham had been brought up among the whigs. Wentworth afforded a thousand remembrances of his youth, now often called into discussion by the progress of the young heir of the house; and I was sorry when the day arrived to summon me from the sober dignities of one of the most unostentatiously-aristocratic of English mansions, to the more brilliant, but less genuine hospitality of Vere Court.

It was my first visit to a spot with which I was connected by so many invisible but indissoluble links. As the niece of the duchess, the widow of Fitzirnham, and the representative of Lord Hugh de Vere, I felt myself to have a triple portion in its destinies; and when my carriage traversed the fine old moated drawbridge, and drew up in the quadrangle of the venerable building, exhibiting at all its gables the wyvern volant, the ancient crest of the house of De Vere, an inexpressible emotion overpowered me, arising from memories of the past.

I had been interrogated by Charles Fox and several other guests at Wentworth House, concerning the character of the young Duke of Rochester; and could only reply, that as he was educated at Brighton, I had not yet seen him; but that, as an object of strong affection to his mother and sisters, I concluded he must be a promising boy. Significant looks were exchanged whenever I uttered this indefinite reply; but I attributed them to the peculiar circumstances connected with his posthumous birth.

"The lad is now in his twelfth year," added Mr. Fox on the late occasion. "The duchess ought to send him to Westminster. All the De Veres were brought up at Westminster; it is time the boy should be there."

I had accordingly determined to seize some moment during my visit to Vere Court, to possess the duchess of the advice of a friend so illustrious; but I found I should have little opportunity for confidential conversation with my aunt. The house, gigantic as it was, was full of company,—people returning from the Moors—from the Lakes—and idling out their time in Lancashire until Doncaster races. Every day, we sat down a party of more than thirty to dinner, with a constant change of guests.

Lord Addenbrooke and Lord Mount-Hardington were both of the party. There were the Wrottesleys, the St. Johns, Sheridan and his bride, the Haggerstons, most of them persons with whom I was intimately acquainted; and the day after my own arrival, Lady Isabella, under the guardianship of her faithful nurse Feltham and another upper servant of the family, arrived from Brighton.

"Have you not brought the young duke with you?" I inquired of her, when arm-in-arm with Lady Helena she ran into my dressing-room, after paying her compliments to the duchess. "I understood he was to pass his holidays at Vere Court?"

The two girls looked at each other, Lady Helena deeply blushing.

"Have you not already seen my brother?" demanded Isabella. "He has been here this fortnight."

"Mamma does not like Henry to leave his suite of rooms, now the house is so full of company," said Helena, replying to her sister; "and I believe she thinks it might be distressing to Mrs. De Vere to see him."

I looked, as I felt—greatly surprised.

"Surely, *chère bonne-maman*," observed Lady Isabella, readily interpreting the expression of my countenance—"you have already heard—you are aware—that Henry is ——" she hesitated.

"Less forward and intelligent than other boys of his age," added Lady Helena, firmly. "It is not surprising that, shaken as my poor mother must have been previous to his birth, the child should not be strong in mind or body. At

one time, it seemed impossible he should be reared. But infinite care and pains have been taken; he is the most affectionate docile creature upon earth; and often, for weeks together, seems to have the full use of his faculties. He soon relapses, however, poor fellow—and more than half the year, is in a state to be seen only by the members of his family. Mamma fancies sea air advantageous; and he has a physician, tutor, and nurse attached to his Brighton establishment, who never lose sight of him."

"Unfortunate boy!" was my involuntary exclamation.

"Last spring, he became so much stronger and more rational, that she determined he should pass a month, this autumn, at Vere Court; in which I fear she was wrong, as the indispensable precautions have caused his unhappy condition to be far more generally known or suspected than they ever were before."

"I always fancied *you* were perfectly well-informed on the subject," observed Isabella, "and that it was out of delicacy to his position you forbore to mention Henry's name to us."

Alas! I could not explain to the girls the true motives of my forbearance. I could only express my sincere sympathy in the mortification which so great a calamity must entail upon their mother.

She, then, whom in my short-sightedness I had thought too happy for her sins—she, on whose account I had presumed to arraign the justice of Providence, was suffering under that heavy dispensation—an idiot child! What thorns must have been wearing into her flesh; what bitter vexations, when I fancied her proudest and most triumphant. Alas! in *her* the sentence of divine wrath was indeed accomplished;—the sins of the parent had been visited upon the child.

Had the young Duke of Rochester, in fact, been deformed even to the worst extreme of human deformity, no mystery would have been observed concerning his misfortune. The world would have known, and the newspapers have proclaimed, what physicians were consulted, and what means resorted to for his recovery. But mental infirmity is an ailment from the admission of which even the least worldly-minded parent shrinks with anguish, as from a confession of lying under the wrath of the Almighty. The silence of

the Duchess of Rochester proclaimed her fully sensible that the heaviest of inflictions had fallen upon the child of her frailty!

So deeply was I penetrated with the awfulness of this retributive decree, that when we met at dinner, I could scarcely summon up my spirits to answer the lively challenge of the Duke of Sicignano, who was just arrived; or to admire the brilliant sallies of George Canning, whose acquaintance I had recently made at Devonshire house, and who was now returning with the young couple, Lord and Lady Titchfield, from a tour to the north.

Country-houses, in those times, were not what I have seen them become under the presidency of my grand-nieces. In *my* time, there was none of the listless apathy of modern fashion. Gaiety was voluble, not to say vociferous; for the Duchess of Gordon had brought into vogue an empty and unmeaning hilarity. Instead of tame *tableaux* and charades —Blind-man's buff and Questions and Commands, filled up many a boisterous evening; even a coterie more refined than that of her grace, had imported from the ill-fated Trianon a taste for *petits jeux de société*, which, if boasting greater elegance, were neither more intellectual nor more discreet. What Miss Fanshawe has so well described as "one eternal cut and shuffle"—Scotch reels, 'Money Musk,' or 'Sir Roger de Coverley'—did honour to our restless activity; while our music was supplied by the jiggety-jig of Arne, and the common-place of Storace, in alternation with that unmeaning Italian school soon to be extinguished by the science and profound sentiment of Mozart. We were beginning to tire of Handel; and flew to frivolous vulgarity, as a contrast to the solemn majesty of the old High-Dutchman.

Vere Court, it is true, was so far superior in tone to other noble mansions of my contemporaries, as to reject the practical jokes of Gordon, Castle or Stowe; nor did the Duchess of Rochester permit her daughters to emulate the private theatricals of Blenheim and of Cliefden. We had music of moderate merit, remarkable only from being performed in concert by fine, interesting, high-bred girls; and cheerful conversation, enhanced by total absence of pretension or pedantry. Though Jekyll, William Spencer, Rogers, and Mat Lewis were in the course of my visit members of our

party, I never heard an *attempt* at wit—no fetching and carrying of bays—no *impromptus faits à loisir*. That most charming of the many charming women settled among us in emigration, Madame de Flahault, the especial favourite of Charles Fox, assured me that the wittiest coteries of her Faubourg St. Germain, exhibited nothing at once so devoid of effort, yet so brilliantly effective, as the society of the Duchess of Rochester.

Again, it must be admitted that the *local* formed an admirable frame-work to the picture thus elegantly designed and brilliantly coloured. Now that nothing remains of venerable Vere Court on whose site Nash nas been permitted to perpetrate one of the most flagrant of his pasteboard solecisms, I may be permitted to describe its once noble entrance-hall, with massive arches and granite columns, looking as though the former Lords de Vere, the bold Barons of the Middle-ages, had been accustomed to ride, clad in complete steel, to the foot of the stairs. There was the grand staircase, emulating the Titanic title of 'the Giant's,' bestowed on that of the ducal palace at Venice. There was the banqueting-hall, with its gallery of carved oak; the armoury, furnished with one of the choicest collections of ancient armour in Europe; there were withdrawing-rooms, with cabinets of ivory carvings, onyx and crystal chalices, of untold value—medals, gems, cameos, intaglios; vases of old Chelsea, old Sevres, old Meissen, old Delft, and probably the first specimens of enamelled Japan brought into Europe;—antique bronzes, antique marbles. A picture-gallery, rich with select specimens of the Italian and Flemish schools—landscapes of Hobbima and Ruysdael, to cool one's fancy in the dog-days—Cuyps, to bestow their fervid influence on the depth of winter—Madonnas, by Raphael, worthy to "waft a mortal to the skies," —Venuses, by Titian "to draw an angel down!" Such portraits by Vandyke—such speaking, meaning, tale-telling faces; such pretty idiots by Lely—all Grammont, breathing from the canvass;—never did I behold a more varied or interesting collection! I used to find Rogers there "commercing" with the walls, "his rapt soul sitting in his eyes," whenever he could free himself from the importunities of the throng of visitors.

Then, there was a suite of tapestried chambers, (overlooking the venerable forest of Vere Chace,) worthy of a thousand ghosts; and the keeper's rooms, adorned with heads of stags in rivalship with the hunting-stacks of Chantilly; and below all, a tremendous justice-hall, lighted by "a cresset with an iron chain," considerably beneath the bed of the moat, and having, it was said, access to unexplored dungeons below. Scattered up and down the vast edifice, moreover, were secret stairs and iron doors; gloomy galleries with Spanish hangings—corridors with groined arches, and ceilings emblazoned with fantastic bearings and devices, enough to have set the Herald's College into confusion.

During the lifetime of the Duke, father to Lord John, Horace Walpole having twice visited Vere Court in a rhapsody of enthusiasm, had been at the trouble of writing out a *catalogue raisonné* of the collections, for the housekeeper to rehearse, which was afterwards printed at the press at Strawberry Hill. But Fitzpatrick, or, I think it was General Burgoyne, having protested that the good woman was in the habit of transforming certain pictures into "Courageous's my Tony," and "Dishum's Dammee," the catalogue was thenceforward ordered to lie on the table, instead of at the mercy of the housekeeper.

All this appeared to *me* right royal. The Duchess had so far reformed her taste since she first complained of the mildew of age encrusting the possessions of the De Veres, as to have restored the plan strictly in accordance with its original character. The state-rooms and galleries had been simply cleaned, and the doors and windows placed in sound condition; the inhabited wing alone being rendered amenable to the laws of modern luxury. But it was to the state-rooms we were compelled to have recourse for our evenings' amusements, during the extension of the party. A fine vaulted music room, the picture gallery, and state drawing room, were every night brilliantly lighted up. Yet, in spite of all that could be done by modern art, the heavy hangings of crimson velvet, the painted ceilings and oaken pannelling, imparted a gloomy character to the place.

"There is something at Vere Court that throws a weight upon my spirits," said Lady Isabella to Lord Addenbrooke, one Sunday night when the organist and sacred music had

been called for by the Duchess, in compliment to one or two of her more serious guests; when a lengthened volume of sound, rolling majestically along the echoing galleries, imparted to the scene the character of some religious solemnity. "One cannot go out to take a walk here, without crossing the drawbridge; or arrive in the drawing room, without traversing that great gulf of a staircase, which seems to belong to a state prison rather than to a dwelling-house."

"It is because you were not accustomed to the spot in early childhood," said I, to whom her observation was partly addressed.

"True! Vere Park, where we lived so long and happily, was gay, cheerful, light, airy."

"And then," added Helena, speaking exclusively to *me*, "it is impossible to forget, when we pass the chapel in the daily routine of life, that it contains the remains of my poor dear father."

"I always concluded that the Duke was interred in the neighbouring parish church, just as Lord Hugh lies at Penderels, among his people and his poor?"

"Our family vault is under the chapel, just below the De Vere monuments which you may have remarked during service this morning."

"Is there one to the memory of the late Duke?" I inquired in a low voice.

"No! It has often struck me with surprise, that mamma never thought of erecting even a tablet!" observed Helena; who, as well as her sisters, remained in ignorance of all details connected with the death of their father.

Here was another motive for the expression of care I sometimes saw expand upon the countenance of the Duchess. A living and a dead witness of her crime constantly beside her: her husband's grave—her idiot son—under her roof! Yet I had dared to tax the Almighty with undue indulgence towards this woman!

"For my part," resumed William Spencer, who had been enlarging with the Duke di Sicignano on the original text of Lady Isabella, "I never visit Vere Court without longing to furnish myself before-hand with a ghost-trap. If such a thing as ghost yet linger upon English earth, unexorcised by Cavendish or Adam Smith—by chemistry and

political economy—it must be within the magic square of the moat surrounding us. I have observed, by the way, that spectres are invariably afflicted with hydrophobia; from those of the Styx, modernwards. *I* speak *avec connaissance de cause.* Lenore is not the only German maiden in whose company I have made ghostly acquaintances; and I see good cause to infer the existence of more than one unearthly visitant at Vere Court."

Deceived by his tone of mock gravity, the two simple-hearted girls turned pale; while Mr. Spencer, unheard by either, continued to whisper to me,—"*Entre nous*, I suspect the 'beauteous majesty of Denmark' has her own misgivings on this point. My life on it, the Duchess would go further and fare worse, rather than venture by moonlight on the battlements; and were my friend Pembury to make his appearance here from Ireland, we should probably be startled from our rest at dead of night by a hollow 'Swear!' proceeding from the subterranean justice-room, uttered in the doleful voice of poor dear Lord John."

"On such a subject, I must be excused from jesting," said I, reprovokingly; and the Duke di Sicignano, noting my grave countenance, saw encouragement to add—

"You would consider Vere Court more gay and airy than the pagoda at Kew, had you seen a castle of mine, said to have been built by the Saracens, in the neighbourhood of Girgenti, now inhabited by owls, lizards, and brigands; to say nothing of my celebrated Castello Pino di Porto in the Abruzzi, of which you must all have heard."

"*I* plead ignorance!" cried William Spencer.

"And I!"

"And I!" echoed the girls.

"Is it so very beautiful a place?"—I ventured to inquire.

"I take it upon trust; I have never been permitted to see it. There is a legend in our family, that any Duke of Sicignano who visits the castle, is foredoomed to a violent death. It is true, that one evening in travelling from Naples to our estates near Otranto, when about ten years old, I prevailed upon my attendants to show me the turrets at a distance, so that I have half incurred the penalty."

"And do you believe in the prediction?" inquired Lady Helena, timidly.

"My father was lost at sea in crossing from Sicily to Calabria; and *he* was always said to have dared his destiny, by witnessing the wonders recorded of the castle. Even my mother, who earnestly dissuaded him from the attempt, regards his untimely death as a judgment on his presumption. At a very early age she laid an injunction upon me, her only son, on pain of her malediction, never to enter the walls; and I have obeyed her."

"But what are the marvels of this wonderful place?" demanded William Spencer.

"I remember hearing something of the story from Beckford, on his return from Italy; I am not sure that he did not witness the miracle," observed the Duchess, in a low tone, attracted towards the group by the earnestness of our conversation and countenances.

"My dear Sicignano, you behold us expiring of curiosity!" cried Mr. Spencer.

"Come, come, Spencer, no ghost-stories in a haunted-house, and on a Sunday above all nights in the week!" exclaimed Jekyll. "You and Lady De Beauclerk have already made us afrard to sleep in our beds, with your diabolical *diableries*. Let me recommend you, for the future, to renounce the devil and all his works."

"Provided always, we are not obliged to renounce our story. 'Tis a long time since I enjoyed a good wholesome horror. Lewis! my dear Lewis! hear is a seat for you beside the Duchess. Sicignano has promised to make our blood run cold, with the true and particular history of his castle in the Abruzzi."

"I will tell you my tale, word for word, as by stealth I overheard my father relate it, fifteen years ago, to an English gentleman of great accomplishments, a guest at our house in Naples. They thought me sleeping on a sofa, while they sat gossiping in the twilight over this and other legends. But the anxious beating of my boyish heart kept my attention on the *qui vive*."

"Hear! hear! hear! hear! hear!" cried William Spencer.

"'From my earliest youth,' said my father, addressing Mr. B.," resumed the Duke,—"'it was my earnest desire

to visit the Abruzzi; but my family would not hear of it; my friends dissuaded me; even my vassals would have been enraged at the idea of my voluntarily incurring the penalty connecting the house of Sicignano with Pino di Porto.'

"'And what,' inquired our guest, 'is supposed to have been the origin of the sinister influence exercised by the atmosphere of the place on its lawful owner?'

"'The frailty of an ancestress! It is a tale we do not like to dwell on. There was adultery, suicide, disgrace; and every anniversary of the day on which the double crime was committed, a drop of blood,—fresh as if newly spilled,—falls from the ceiling upon the floor of the fatal chamber in which the fatal deed was done; accompanied by a thrilling sound, as if from the reverberation of some brazen instrument. There is nothing very appalling in the thing; nothing to provoke cowardice on the part of those present; but believe me, had you witnessed as I have the phenomenon, you would—'

"'You—you *witnessed* the fact?' cried my father's friend, Mr. B——, with an air of incredulity."

"'It was a rash hazard, was it not, to risk the accomplishment of the legend for the satisfaction of my idle curiosity?' said my father.

"'No!' replied B——, 'had such an adventure been within *my* reach, I would have encountered it at a peril of my life.'

"'Yet I was almost braved into the attempt,' replied the Duke, with a sigh. 'When scarcely eighteen, and on my travels, as you are now, I was in Hungary on a hunting-party with the Szechenyis, Sandors, Esterhazys, Apponys, Karolys, and other young magnates of my own age and rank; when one night it was our chance to bivouac round a fire on the skirts of a forest in Transylvania. The moment was propitious for the relation of travellers' wonders; and after having recited all the authenticated sporting lies we could call to mind,—anecdotes of which bears, wolves, and wild horses were the heroes, we dwindled at length down to spectres and devils. Appony related the apparition of the famous coach and six, spectral postilions and outriders, which loses itself once a year in a morass near one of his chateaux. Keglovics had a tale of a female

phantom haunting the gallery of his palace at Buda,—the figure of a Greek lady in perfect costume, which, when pursued, turns slowly round, and no face is visible, nothing but the dress, which glides slowly out of sight.'

"'All these are mere optical deceptions,' said I, the vapour of a marsh—the reflection of a picture. But in one of *my* country-seats, there falls, at a certain hour of a certain day of the year, a fresh-spilt drop of blood.'

"'Some hayduck who obliges you by cutting his finger for the purpose,'' said Keglovies, piqued at my previous incredulity.

"'Or a patch of red-ink, dropped by your steward when settling his accounts!' said another of the party.

"'I have not witnessed the thing, and should therefore be cautious in supporting it by my attestation,' said I. 'But there are four among you who have announced an intention of wintering at Naples. The tenth of March is the fatal day; and if you are inclined to try the adventure, we will sleep the preceding night in the castle,—ay! even at the risk of the fate denounced ages ago to every Sicignano crossing the threshold of Pino di Porto.'

"'My challenge was readily accepted. One of the Schwarzenberg family, a Keglovies, a Palffy, and an Appony, spent that winter at Naples; and many a time amid the fêtes of the court and the carnival, did I remind them of our Abruzzian expedition. Rumours of our romantic project got wind; and at the commencement of March, a party of twelve, including my countrymen, the Princes Cimitile, Castelcicala, three English and an Irish gentleman, prepared for a few days' sojourn in the mountains. It is remarkable that not a single Frenchman volunteered to join us.'

"Among the English," continued the young Duke of Sicignano, interrupting himself to address Lady Helena, "was a noble namesake of your own—a certain Lord John De Vere."

At this unlucky apostrophe all were silent; but the eager Neapolitan, attributing this to our interest in his narrative, hastened to proceed.

"'The party arrived at the castle. There was no enchanted horn to sound without the aid of mortal warder on their approach. The house was thoroughly dismantled;

not an inhabitant, except the servants despatched before to be in waiting on the guests; not an article of furniture, save a table and chairs, and a few camp-beds, hastily fitted up for their accommodation. Innumerable bats flitted hither and thither in the great hall; foxes littered in the old kitchen. No trace was there of human habitation, save a solitary, strange, shaggy-looking, half-wild black dog; which, after glaring and growling fiercely upon our attendants for a few minutes, suddenly made up its mind to welcome the bearers of the flesh-pots of Israel. The domestication of this uncouth beast in the deserted castle, as well as traces of a recent fire on the vast hearth of one of the galleries, induced some of our party to give faith to the popular report, that the castle was the haunt of brigands. But this notion admitted of counter argument. The dust lay undisturbed on the pavement of the great hall; and cobwebs overhung the locks and hinges of the principal apartments.'

"'It was evening when we reached the spot. There was neither time nor light for proceeding to a survey of the premises. All we could do was to take possession of the chamber prepared for us, where a prodigious fire of pine logs was blazing on the hearth; and a plain but solid meal of fish and game, procured from the peasants of the environs, with some excellent Lachrymæ Christi, several hampers of which formed an essential part of our baggage, soon made its appearance. We ate, drank, and were merry; smoked, romanced, and jested, till winking eyes proclaimed, in the absence of a clock, that it was time to retire to two adjoining sleeping chambers, opening by wide folding doors into each other, in which our thirteen beds were deposited; for to the credit of our courage be it spoken, I and my twelve visiters formed exactly the unlucky apostolic number, so appalling to superstitious minds.'

"'As we made our uproarious way from the supper-table to the bed-rooms, through a dark suite where the tapers carried by my servants, served only to rouse the bats from their slumber, nothing would deter Keglovies from roaring aloud, snatches of drinking songs of very irreverent tendency, in order, as we told him, to keep up his courage. But no chorus, either of demons or brigands, answered the challenge; and without further adventure we

betook ourselves quietly to rest. Our hayducks and chasseurs were to lie at the respective doors of the two rooms, to guard us from disturbance: they extinguished our tapers and retired.'

"'Why did you not tell those fellows of yours to put out the lights?' cried I to Schwarzenberg, who slept in the second room.

"'They did,' he replied, in the tone of a person already half asleep.

"'They carried the candles out of the room for their own use,' added Keglovies, who was somewhat overpowered with wine.

"'But, my dear fellow, your room is as light as at midday,' said I, disturbed by a bright radiance that streamed full on my face.'

"'*Cospetto!* come and judge for yourself,' cried Prince Amadeo Cimitile; and though I had little mind to turn out on a cold night in March, more particularly as I suspected some trick on the part of my companions, I obeyed.

"'And you found?'

"'Not a taper—not a candle in the room—the embers almost extinguished on the hearth—yet the chamber so brightly illuminated that you might have seen to decypher the smallest print!

"'What in Heaven is the meaning of this!' cried I, in amazement.

"'What on earth, I suppose you mean,' retorted Scwharzenberg.

"'*I* should rather say, what in Hell!' growled Keglovies, turning sullenly in his bed. Do make an end of the farce, Sicignano; put out the light, and leave us to rest after our journey.

"'Rouse yourself, I entreat, was my reply, and ascertain with your own eyes that there is no taper, no lamp, no faggot, no anything, burning in the room; the light is spontaneous and superhuman!

"'Thus apostrophized, several of them arose, and confirmed my statement. The further of the two rooms was, in utter darkness; the other, bright as with meridian sunshine!

"'I came hither to witness the miracle of the drop of blood,' exclaimed Keglovies, angrily: 'I did not bargain

for being kept awake all night by a Calabrian Jack-o'-lantern.'

"'And at my proposal, he accepted a change of beds, and I became a seventh in the *chambre ardente*. Before I lay down, however, I called in a faithful servant of my family, born on the estate, who was among the domestics, keeping watch over the chamber door, and consulted him as to the origin of the mysterious light.

"'Fabiano stood trembling and crossing himself in silence.—Again I interrogated him. Your Excellency has willed it so, was his reply. Spontaneous lights foretel the death of the spectator. One of those present must die. Your Excellency knows the fate foredoomed to any Duca di Sicignano bold enough to enter here.

"'Nevertheless, this strange omen was followed by no remarkable incident. The light shone throughout the night; but the whole of my companions slumbered undisturbed; and towards morning, I myself fell into a heavy sleep. It was not wonderful, considering the nature of our expedition, that *my* couch should be visited by unquiet dreams. I fancied I had descended into our family mausoleum at Agurra, in Sicily; where I was condemned to open, one after another, the mouldering coffins of my progenitors. All were resting tranquilly—my mother—father—grandfather. But when I came to the ancestress whose crime is supposed to have been the source of so many fatalities to our house, I found *her* lying awake in her shroud, preyed on by a thousand reptiles and presenting an appalling spectacle!

"'Awaking with a start, I perceived that the mysterious light had disappeared, giving way to the cold brightness of a winter sunrise. The heads of the neighbouring mountains, covered with snow, seemed to reflect themselves even through the gloomy panes of the old castle.

"'We were soon up and astir. The vassels had been already assembled by the *gardes chasse* for a *battue*, and the *largesse* of their unknown young lord distributed for the first time among them, imparted double animation to the sports of the day. Two packs of fine boar-hounds had been united by Castelcicala and Cimitile for the occasion; and I never witnessed a finer day's sport.

"'Even the stauncheſt of us began at last to fail. The

arduous day closed, and we returned hungry and weary to the castle; not one of us but regretting that it was the fatal tenth of March; and that we were in honour bound to keep up and awake till midnight, to witness the miracle of the spot of blood!

"'By the way, Sicignano, couldn't we *postpone* the catastrophe? inquired Keglovies, the most sceptical of our party. I've heard of your famous miracle of San Gennaro being put off a week or so, by order of the King?—There are still hampers of Lachryma Christi cooling in the old cellars; and such a day's sport makes one long to keep it up for half a dozen more in the Abruzzi. Come! say the word, and defy the devil!!"——

"'But the bolder grew the mirth of the Count, said my father, as he gravely related these particulars to Mr. B——; 'the greater grew the unaccountable uneasiness of my mind. I have given proof, on more than one important occasion, that I have the heart of a man within my breast. Yet I own that, as dinner proceeded, I knew not what viands were placed before me;—quail or venison,—all seemed alike; and when Keglovies, noting my absence of mind, caused his hayduck to substitute a glass of pure alkermès, the strongest of our liqueurs, for the wine standing beside, me, I drank it off without suspicion of the change of contents. An Irish gentleman of the party, an officer in the Austrian service, Count Taaffe, seeing me so deeply affected, proposed aside to the others to forbear all further attention to the event of the night, in hopes I should forget the subject of my tribulation.

"'Not for a moment, however, did it escape my thoughts! The striking of the convent-bell of Santa-Chiara, half a league lower on the mountain, at midnight, was said to give the signal for the dread event. The chamber of blood was not situated upon the principal story, but on the ground-floor; a large desolate looking room, which we had visited by daylight ere we departed for the chase, in order to assure ourselves that no means of imposition existed. The ceiling indeed was of a ghastly whiteness, as if repaired and whitened long after the rest of the edifice; and the dark and dirty floor had evidently been planed roughly away in several places, as if to efface the stains of the event, lending such peculiar horror to the chamber.

"'It had been previously settled among the servants that, on the memorable day, our board should be spread in a large room, within two of this detestable chamber, that we might be within ready reach of the spot; and when, at about ten o'clock, the servants in attendance withdrew to sup in an adjoining gallery, Fabiano, my old chasseur, who remained behind the rest to add fresh logs to the hearth, whispered to me that he had already placed lamps in "*the* room."

"'After all,' cried Keglovies, who overheard his announcement, 'nothing would be easier, my dear Sicignano, than for these fellows of yours to afford confirmation to your word, by stationing themselves in a chamber above, and causing the drop to penetrate through the ceiling?"

"'Of *that* your Excellency may make yourself the judge,' retorted the old man. "By taking note of the plan of the castle, you will find that the room immediately above the Chamber of Blood, is the very one in which you slept last night."

"'This remark, combined with the recollection of the spectral light, completed the depression of my sptrits. I knew not what was passing around me. I heartily wished myself elsewhere. Keglovies persisted in his boisterous mirth, his songs, his vauntings;—till, had I not been apprehensive of drawing ridicule upon my irritability, I could have found it in my heart to provoke him to a quarrel. At last, he called on his servant to bring dice; and, in company with Taaffe, Cimitile, and Schwarzenberg, who were confirmed gamesters, began a game of Hazard, in order as they said, to escape the spectacle of my doleful countenance.

"'They played high—they talked loud. The brands mouldered on the hearth,—the tapers wavered in their sconces. Overpowered by the sports of the day and the fiery potion which Count Keglovies had beguiled me into swallowing, I sunk back in my chair and began to doze. From time to time, I was roused up, indeed, by the exclamations and execrations of my young friends; and seeing them through my half-closed eye-lids, still grouped together, the empty wine-flasks still on the table before me, and the tapers glimmering at the further end which had been cleared for them to throw the dice, I sank down to sleep, with the

agreeable certainty of having still two uneventful hours before me for repose. At length, the indistinctness of a thousand visions, seemed to condense into a settled shape before me. I was in a gloomy, old, tapestry-hung-chamber; a sort of library,—for there were cases of books, and astronomical instruments, and scrolls of parchment. In the midst stood a table; beside which sat a grave, middle-aged noble-looking person, wearing a badge of order. He was writing, evidently in great perturbation of mind. Ever and anon, he rose, and with hurried steps paced the room; then re-seated himself to write. I saw him take from his bosom a miniature picture, dash it forcibly on the table, stamp it violently on the ground; till, finding himself unable to grind it into atoms, he threw it into a fire burning on the hearth. At that moment, the door flew open and there appeared a very lovely woman, not in extreme youth; but apparently about to become a mother, who slowly advanced towards the infuriated old man. I trembled: for in her features I discovered the same face I had seen the preceding night, wakeful in its shroud,—the face of the ancestress!—I started,—I awoke,—I shook off the painful illusions of sleep; but it was only to acquire a waking certainty, equally painful. The tapers were burning low—the hour was at hand!

"'My exclamation startled every one to his feet—for on looking at my watch, I perceived that it wanted scarcely ten seconds of midnight. Not a moment was to be lost. Snatching one of the candles and crying 'Follow,' to the rest, I hurried towards the fatal chamber. There were still two rooms to traverse when I heard the convent clock from the valley below commence striking six—for with us the hours commence at sunset. Two seconds must have elapsed ere the fastening of the second door could be made to yield to my hand; for exactly as I reached the centre of the room, I heard a clang that seemed to vibrate through every stone and rafter of the castle—then a profound silence; and as I threw open the door of the last room, a plash as of the falling of a heavy drop of rain. Not one of my companions but heard it as I did!—Our first impulse was to hold our lights towards the floor. But the lamps already burning *rendered distinctly visible the fatal spot of blood!* Not a thing animate or inanimate was there; nothing but that

accusing stain,—dread trace of the dishonour of the ancestress!"

The last words had scarcely fallen from the lips of the Duke of Sicignano, when a shriek burst from Lady Helena de Vere—and a cry (as of the "Look to the Queen!" in Hamlet) drew all eyes towards the Duchess of Rochester, who had sunk back fainting in her chair.

"Take me away—*you*—only *you*," she whispered to me, fervently clasping my hand as I bent over her; and with a sign to the rest to leave us unmolested, I raised her from her seat, and led her gently out of the gallery. As we crossed the vestibule uniting the state rooms with the inhabited wing, I perceived through two lofty gothic windows that opened from the chapel, the gleaming of a light which displayed the achievements and monumental escutcheons of the De Veres, appended to the walls. The Dutchess saw it too, and seemed to hang more heavily on my arm.

I discovered afterwards that the organist was there, replacing in the organ loft some anthems he had been playing in the music room. But at that hour,—in that place,—every thing appeared an omen!

CHAPTER XI.

The following day, the Duchess kept her room, and requested me to do the honours of Vere Court in her place. When I visited her in the course of the afternoon, I observed so strange an alteration in her countenance, that I entreated Lady Isabella to send for advice.

"I have already proposed it," she replied, "but mamma refuses; and the Duchess is not a person to bear dictation from her daughters on such a point."

The Duchess was right. The whole College of Physicians, with poor dear fiddle-faddle Sir Walter Farquhar to boot, would have done nothing for her. Her malady was of the mind; and seemed, during the time she remained confined to her room, hourly to increase. Several of the more formal guests, concluding their presence to be *de trop* under such circumstances, insisted on abridging their visit, and departed without further ceremony; while the Duke of Sicignano, the limit of whose invitation expired in the interval, made an explicit request to be admitted to the honour of an audience of her Grace. The Duchess refused! The young man became urgent, *she* more positive. He then frankly admitted to me, that his object was to demand the hand of Lady Helena; and the girls pressed me to exercise my influence with the Duchess, not only to receive him, but to receive him favourably.

I went straight to the point; acquitted myself of my mission, and explained the intention of his: when she answered, without circumlocution, that nothing should induce her to accept the Neapolitan Duke for a son-in-law! Vainly did I remind the perverse lady of a declaration made in the spring to Henry and myself, that she would not interfere to prevent a match which seemed to involve the happiness of her daughter.

"It was very true; she perfectly remembered the circumstance; but she had since taken counsel from her friends, and those of the late Duke of Rochester. The Duke di Sicignano was a Papist, of whom and of whose family comparatively little was known in England. She saw in the alliance nothing to tempt her to the sacrifice of her daughter's society. Helena was young and inexperienced, and fancied herself attached to a handsome young man, who had been the first to call her an angel in a London ball-room. But *she*, as guardian of the girls, was responsible to the world for their welfare, and must look for something more."

I saw it was idle attempting to shake her resolution; and suspecting some recent *guignon* against the Duke, strongly advised the young couple to wait a more propitious moment. But lovers are not to be advised with impunity. Within an hour of my decree, the Duke addressed a formal letter of proposal to the mother of Lady Helena,

offering *carte blanche* in the way of settlements and every other arrangement, which was peremptorily, nay haughtily, rejected; rejected in a tone that left no opening for perseverance. All that remained for the Duca di Sicignano was to order post-horses and depart from Vere Court.

The circumstance most irritating, however, in the affair was, that while *he* departed, Lord Mount-Hardington remained; remained master of the field, and with an exulting countenance. Even Lord Addenbrooke, of whom the English *prétendu* was the intimate friend, did not conceal his satisfaction that he was not to have a foreigner for his brother-in-law; and I observed with pain for my young friend, that all those staying in the house, to whom the despair of the lovers had given a tolerable insight into what was going on, applauded the opposition of the Duchess. Foreigners were getting out of fashion. As is the case in every extensive emigration, the bad had crowded to England with the good; and the respectable French were made accountable for the encroachments of swindlers. Sicignano was a foreigner and a Papist—no matter whether from Paris or Palermo—he could not be a desirable *parti* for the daughter of the premier Duke of England.

"My mother's antipathy was certainly a very sudden one," observed Isabella and Adeline, having followed me to my dressing room the night after Sicignano's departure, and the Duchess's re-appearance in the drawing-room.

"I could almost fancy it had its rise in that foolish anecdote we forced him to relate," continued Isabella.

"Perhaps his avowal that the Sicignanos are a predestined race, may have had some share in prejudicing her against him," observed Adeline; "till then, she had been very gracious: but from that night she never spoke to him."

"You forget the indisposition which confined her to her room, and rendered it impossible; which, though unobserved by yourselves, commenced that morning," added Isabella. "It was my fate to open the letter-bag, and carry to my mother a packet, bearing the Irish post-mark. On seeing it, she was greatly agitated, bade me leave her to the perusal of her letters, and instead of attending service as usual in the chapel, I watched her into Henry's apartments, where I have since learned that she passed the whole morning in tears. If anything serious had occurred

to depress her spirits, poor Sicignano's story was certainly ill-timed. But for this week past, mamma has not been in her usual state of mind. Adeline! my cousin Rawborne is coming in a day or two; you must get *him* to find out the secret, and say a word in favour of the poor Duke. Helena is quite heart-broken."

And Lady Adeline readily promised in the name of her lover; but without exciting expectations of a favourable result on the part of either her sisters or myself.

Meanwhile, I had derived some advantage from this unlucky visit of Sicignano, by obtaining the fullest personal details concerning the Countess his kinswoman; but like most inquisitive people, I had procured aliment for my own disquiet. Alidea di Visconti, he informed me, was beautiful, sprightly, and *scarcely twenty years of age! This* was the thorn that pierced home,—she was ten years younger than myself! and it needs to have experienced the exquisite pang of jealousy produced by the charms of a youthful rival, to become sensible of the force of that single attraction. I,—I, so world-worn,—so haggard in heart,—could appreciate better than any the potency of the charm. It is not, as the vulgar would interpret, the mere lustre of the eye, the mere bloom of the complexion, that renders irresistible the soft purity of youth. It is the warm heart yet unchilled by the mortifications of life: it is the bright soul, still beaming with the unsullied lustre derived from its divine source. In early life, the spiritual predominates. As we live on and on, clay gains the ascendancy; we grow material, we grow mortal. In the society of Alidea, my cousin doubtless found that spring of hope, that sanguine confidence, that sense of immortal hope, which imparts such buoyancy to life; too early, alas! wrested from my bankrupt nature!

The Duke had heard nothing, however, of any intimacy between his fair relation and Algernon. "I must own," said he, when replying to my interrogatory, "that with us, such *liaisons* are too much a matter of course, for any one to think it worth while to notice it in a letter; unless the lady had played the traitress, and deserted one *cavaliere* for another. Still, I never desire to hear of my English friends involving themselves in similar connexions. Of all soft slaveries, it is the most *routinier*, and consequently

the most permanent; for it is far easier to get rid of a sentiment than a habit."

"According to our views, there must be some difficulty in *acquiring* the habit," said I. "To us, the *cavalieri serventi* of Italy appear to hold the place of upper servants. In England, women exercise some influence over manners and morals; but having disdained the exaction of personal service, such bondage, like the usages of feudal times, has fallen into disuse. No public adulation is offered by the English lover to the lady of his thoughts. *Our* tenderness is of a silent, undemonstrative order; and cicisbeism is no less revolting to our principles than repugnant to our habits."

But sooth to say, however inclined to assume high grounds of morality for my countrywomen, I felt that Sicignano was a man of too much sagacity not to have been struck by the corruption of our higher orders, to which his eminent diplomatic situation had restricted his observation. The aristocracies of all the civilized countries of Europe, exhibit a family likeness, as the same soil and latitude produces every where a similarity of vegetation; luxury and idleness will as surely beget licentiousness in the realms of the virtuous Maria Theresa, as in those of the profligate Catharine. The moral writers of England, deriving their examples chiefly from the middle classes, whose cares and occupations combine with the strictness of the Protestant faith to preserve them from excess, proclaim with justice the purity of our domestic life; but Sicignano, whose eyes were fixed upon certain coteries, which have bequeathed to our peerage full many a page defiled with—"which marriage was dissolved by act Act of Parliament,"—was not to be hoodwinked by mere assumption. He knew exactly the amount of temperance, soberness, and chastity, accrediting the sancity of the world of London fashion.

The era I have been describing was, in fact, one of great social brilliancy—great social license. Its legends are hived among the minor archives of history; but posterity will be required to accept wit, beauty, and magnificence, in atonement for the outrage of domestic ties, and an utter contempt of the claims of suffering humanity. The reign of Charles II. is read as a brilliant and licentious comedy; while the frank gallantry of Henry II. or the regal splen-

dours of Louis le Grand, shed a false lustre over their several epochs, blinding us to the disunion of families, the confusion of offspring, the persecutions and sufferings of the people. Even I have survived to see regretful looks cast back upon that Hegira of our own political history, when uproarious mobs surrounded the sovereign whenever he appeared in public, crying aloud for "bread;"—and a hearse was actually driven into the court-yard of St. James's, for purposes of intimidation; that period in our social history, when the homely but censorious domesticity of the court compelled the noble lovers of pleasure to have recourse to temples of their own, whose codes and regulations exhibited a most accommodating relaxation of moral rigour. In this, the age of utilitarianism to which I have survived, there appears to be too much activity and publicity for the growth of voluptuousness:—that bloated

> Toad which under the cold stone
> Days and nights had, thirty-one,
> Sweltering venom sleeping got,

has been dislodged from its shelter by the spirit of improvement which has set every rock a rolling!

At the period of the Prince's marriage, people had not only ample leisure for sin, but even for superabundant discussion of the sinfulness of the sinner. The news accordingly soon became general, which had been whispered to us by Lady Isabella, that confidential letters intrusted by the Princess of Wales to Dr. Randolph (afterwards Bishop of London), to be delivered to her family in Brunswick, had been detained and opened; nay, that the sarcasms on Windsor Castle and its inmates, contained in their pages, had found their way back to her Royal Highness, from the lips of the Queen!

So busy was the hand of scorn in pointing out Lady Jersey as the origin of this domestic mischief, that the Earl, her husband, felt himself called upon to address a laboured defence to the newspapers, which went so far only as to prove, that Dr. Randolph, having postponed his journey, had sent the letters back by the Brighton coach enclosed to her ladyship, while her ladyship protested they had never reached her hands. By what magnetic influ-

ence the contents of the packet were transferred from the London coach-office to the knowledge of Her Majesty, was not made to appear; the only thing clearly apparent to the public was the injury sustained by the Princess of Wales.

This painful exposure of the domestic discord of the Pavilion, tended to increase a thousand fold the distaste of Lady Isabella for her post. Again and again did she entreat permission of the Duchess to send in her resignation.

"Wait but a few months," persisted her mother, "and your marriage will afford us a pretext. On what plea could we now ground such a proceeding? Delicacy of health? Absurd! when their Royal Highnesses have so lately seen you in the full bloom of youth and beauty."

"They will know it to be a pretext of courtesy to conceal my distaste for Carlton House; but I have no wish to disguise my feelings on the subject."

"It is your mother who will be made accountable for your perversity."

"My dear mamma!"

"Yes! His Royal Highness would consider your retirement a direct accusation on my part against Lady Jersey, —a committal of her and himself in the eyes of the public; and have just cause to complain that one of the earliest and dearest of his friends, should so earnestly disregard his interests."

"You are very earnest, then, that I should remain?" inquired Isabella in a desponding voice.

"I ask it as a *favour*, which is a strong word for so trifling a sacrifice. Lord Addenbrooke assures us his father's sanction to your marriage will arrive at Christmas; and before the commencement of the ensuing season, you will have bidden adieu to Carlton House, and become Countess of Addenbrooke. From that period, your movements will be regulated by your husband."

"Do you then suppose the marriage will take place in the course of the winter?" said I, mistrustfully, when Isabella had quitted the room.

"Why not?—What obstacle should prevent it? With five daughters, I am naturally anxious that one of them should settle in life, to afford a protectress to the rest in case of any mischance to myself, and were my own wish-

es solely to be consulted, I would willingly see Helena and Adeline married on the same day with their sister."

"Helena? Have you then relented in favour of the Duke of Sicignano?" cried I, with dawning hopes.

"So far from it, that I have conditionally accepted for her the proposals of Lord Mount-Hardington. Adeline will complete her seventeenth year early in February, and a single celebration might solemnize the marriages of the three sisters. There is nothing more insupportable than to have engaged young ladies sighing and sentimentalizing about one. You will greatly oblige me, dear Mrs. De Vere, by assisting me to put an end as early as possible to this false and embarrassing position."

This was a fair challenge for a bold avowal of my opinions. My duty to the memory of Lord Hugh was imperative; and I spoke as strongly against Isabella's retention of her place and a precipitate marriage for a child like Adeline, as in favour of poor Sicignano.

I expected rejoinder; I expected opposition; for my observations coincided with those of her daughters that, for some days past, the temper of the Duchess had been considerably ruffled. But not a syllable did she deign in reply. She fixed her calm, cold, calculating eye upon me for some moments in silence, then rose and quitted the room; and from that period, the Duchess of Rochester's demeanor was so reserved and distant, that it was impossible not to relinquish my determination of remaining at Vere Court. Three days after my advocacy of the cause of the three girls, I found myself and my wounded pride on our way home to Penderels.

CHAPTER XII.

Could any thing have increased the depression of my spirits on my own account as well as on that of my young cousins, the omens of that dreary autumn were certainly calculated to call forth the most melancholy forebodings! Every day served to produce some public disaster. The coercive measures created by the public insults offered to the King on the day of the opening of Parliament, threw a damp over the political atmosphere; while such was the intemperance of the equinoctial season, that fleets sank upon our coasts; and "high towers and moss-grown steeples" were toppled down in all directions. Loss of life, loss of property, was heard of by every mail; every hour brought fresh tidings of national calamity.

The very day after my return to Penderels, was signalized by a hurricane unprecedented in England in the memory of man; when the rising of the river Lea occasioned great devastation in my little domain, and several of the fine old timber-trees adorning the place were snapt like reeds before the wind.

All these portents oppressed my spirits. I had not yet passed a solitary winter at Penderels. The mild companionship of Lord Hugh, whose infirmities of health softened his character to almost feminine gentleness and afforded him leisure for the attainment of universal information, had spoiled me for ordinary society. The intelligent, the high-bred, and the high principled, are not so readily attainable in a provincial neighbourhood. My house and establishment were now perfected. But those whom I would have welcomed under my roof, were far away; and my courage actually fell before the desolate prospect of my lonely winter. A country life enjoyed with a knot of chosen society, may be a charming thing; but a country life without so much as a favourite companion with whom one may "sit by the fire and presume to know what's done in the capitol," is the acmé of desolation.

I was half inclined to set forth on my long-promised visits to my two sisters. But Ailesfort Castle, at a distance

of three hundred miles from the metropolis, presented an alternative of little promise; and as to the Rothesburys, Jane was still so wholly engrossed by her husband and child, that I might as well have betaken myself for society to the arm-chair of poor old doting Lady Carleton, or the family vault of the Rawbornes.

The necessity of making unto myself an interest in life, became every day more apparent. I called to mind our family tendency to a survival of the mental faculties; I recollected the superannuated Earl drivelling away his days in St. James's-square, and the Viscountess now reduced to similar annihilation, and trembled for my own old age. I was rich; but what availed my riches? I was young; but what would soon avail my youth? My fortune had already found suitors; my youth admirers; but among them all, not one whom I could find it in my soul to instal master of myself and Penderels; not one with whom I could hope to feel the undivided sympathy, without which companionship is so much more wearisome than solitude.

Such was the state of my feelings when I received from dear Isabella de Vere one of those letters so full of hope, so full of happiness, which arise out of the abundance of a youthful heart, on the eve of the accomplishment of its destinies.

"A month more; only one month more, *chèe bonne-maman*," she wrote, "and Lord and Lady Kincardine's answer will arrive! Already Addenbrooke and myself are projecting our numerous arrangements. There is a beautiful *marino* on the coast of Sussex not far from Bognor, which he has begged of his father for our habitation. It was bequeathed to the Kincardines by a maiden aunt; and being too insignificant to consort with their ideas of family dignity, they have never inhabited the place. I shall have therefore something to model to my ideas of beauty and happiness; with thickets of China roses and a noble sea-view to work upon. Helena is very busy japanning me a set of pannels for a morning-room; and Adeline and the two girls are toiling away over their tapestry-frames, for a set of furniture. Think how delightful, to have my new abode adorned by the kindness of my dear sisters. Addenbrooke contributes *himself* to my new drawing room: as "a double cherry seeming-parted," in the shape of a fine

portrait by Hoppner, for which he sat last summer in London. I begin to long for this same paradise of Woodbeach; for, as I need not tell you, I have no great predilection for Vere Court; and mamma is just now greatly depressed in spirits, which does not enhance the charms of the place. *Entre nous*, poor Henry has been much worse; and his health is beginning to suffer from the disturbance of his mind. Afflicted as my brother is, and without hope of cure, it might be imagined that my mother would easily resign herself to the prospect of losing him; but this is so far from the case, that since his illness she has confined herself almost wholly to his apartments; and appears more attached to this unhappy boy than to any other of her children. As soon as he is able to bear the journey, we shall quit Vere Court, that he may resume his residence at Brighthelmstone, as he is unquestionably better near the sea. I know not why, but I cannot help fancying that some important change is about to take place in the family!

"*En attendant*, dearest and kindest friend, I doubt whether *you*, who are so partial to the Duke of Sicignano, will be pleased to hear that Lord Mount-Hardington is not only still here, but has evidently made some progress in the favour of Helena. Though supported by mamma's utmost authority, he has the good sense and good taste to avoid the most remote allusion to his pretensions. But he is always by her side,—always at her orders,—ready to walk, ride, drive, converse, or be silent, as suits her little ladyship's fancy. Altogether, it would not very much surprise me if this generous devotion to her whims eventually wrought a change in my sister's sentiments. I have lately heard her allude to Sicignano with a sort of superstitious dread; and the positiveness of my mother's character is such as to forbid all chance of her withdrawing an interdiction, in the face of which not one of her daughters would find courage to give way to her inclinations. In short, you may inscribe Helena in your mind as sooner or later Lady Mount-Hardington,—*later*, in all probability; but with all my desire that my own marriage and those of my sisters should have but a single celebration, I am not so generous as to hope that the consent of the Kincardines may be retarded to allow time for a decisive change of sentiment.

"Addenbrooke has been three times into the library, to quarrel with me for bestowing on Mrs. De Vere so large a portion of the time which already he takes the liberty of considering his own! He forgets how soon I shall have my slave-collar rivetted on, and how willing I am to submit to the subjugation. Every day adds to my conviction of his good qualities; and were it not for the hazard said by the superstitious to attend such vauntings, I should not hesitate to proclaim myself the happiest creature in the world.

* * * * *

"Be happy,—young and innocent heart!"—was my involuntary exclamation, as I perused her letter. "Be happy, as you are deserving happiness!" But the information it afforded excited many a conjecture in my mind. I could easily enter into the Duchess's disquietudes for her son. To suppose her actuated by genuine maternal attachment for a creature thus miserably afflicted, was out of the question. But on the death of the young Duke, of whose person and estate she was sole guardian, the whole De Vere property would pass to a collateral branch, leaving her only Vere Park as a dower-house, with an inconsiderable income for her support. The girls were slenderly provided for; and though the marriage of the three elder would lessen her incumbrances, Susan and Maria must remain to diminish her means, without adding to her happiness. No one who had ever seen the Duchess after the fall of the curtain of society, could be deceived into the idea that she derived a moment's pleasure from the society of her daughters.

Under these prospects, a scheme presented itself to my imagination, for which I lost no time in soliciting her sanction. I offered myself as a guardian and mother to the two younger girls; offering to divide between them the inheritance to which I had succeeded, on the death of Lord Hugh de Vere.

"The world," said I, wishing to place before her every argument in favour of the plan,—will find no cause for cavilling at a domestic arrangement remotely suggested by the will of their poor uncle; more particularly, as the inadequacy of their fortunes to their condition in life, would render the fate of Susan and Maria more than precarious,

in the event of any important change in the family. Admitted as I have been to your Grace's confidence, you will pardon me for explicitely adverting to the probability of your early marriage with Lord Pembury; in which event, I cannot imagine that two girls of the age of my young cousins, would be a welcome addition to your domestic circle. If in this supposition I am mistaken, attribute the error to my anxiety for their welfare; no less than to my desire for such a relief from my present loneliness as will not prove fatal to my ulterior views for the benefit of your daughters. To speak plainly, I do not intend to marry; and I wish to enjoy the society of those who will eventually inherit all I possess. You, my dear aunt, on the eve of accomplishing such long-cherished projects of happiness in a marriage with the object of your early affection, will not deny me the compensation I implore for the untimely destruction of my own domestic felicity."

That an appeal thus considerately worded, and kindly intended, could promote displeasure on the part of the Duchess of Rochester, did not for a moment enter my imagination; nor can I describe my perplexity on receiving some days afterwards the following reply:—

"I ought not to feel surprise, perhaps, at any extent of insult offered to me by one from whom I have overlooked such monstrous perfidy and ingratitude. Yes! your treachery alone was the cause of my husband's death—my son's grievous infirmity. You have supplanted me in the affection of my daughters—you have supplanted my daughters in the inheritance of their uncle. Penderels, which you enjoy as the reward of your machinations, should have been their property; yet you presume to offer as a benefactress, that which you ought to surrender as a restitution!

"Of the outrage towards myself contained in your letter, I say nothing. If the memory of your mother did not interpose to preserve her sister from your insults, my rebuke will little avail. Henceforward, let me hear no more of you."—"I humiliated myself too deeply in acceding to a renewal of our intercourse; but from this moment, whether as my kinswoman, or as the heiress of Lord Hugh de Vere, I banish you from my house and heart."

Even accustomed as I had once been to the caprices of the

Duchess, this letter appeared inexplicable. But the newspapers of the day soon brought a solution of the enigma, in an announcement, that "On Monday, the 1st of December, was married, at the parish church of Ballylidwell, in the county of Clare, John, Earl of Pembury, to Ellen, youngest daughter of the Rev. William Power, rector of Ballylidwell." And the Duchess had, therefore, reason to infer that my letter conveyed a wilful and deliberate offence.

We are apt to repeat, as a cut and dry axiom of morality, that sin is its own chastisement, and virtue its own reward. But without risk of misleading the mind of youth to which such truisms are addressed, we rather hold with a distinguished French writer, that a fallen woman's punishment is distributed in this world by the ingratitude of her lover. Every man seems to hold at his disposal a flaming sword, wherewith to revenge the faults committed in his favour.

It would have been much to exact of the honour of a libertine such as Lord Pembury, to sacrifice himself to a woman neither young nor beautiful; whose very youth and beauty had been deformed by the violence of her temper, and weakness of her principles. He had known the Duchess as a bad wife—a bad mother. His own disgraceful connexion with her was cemented by a pledge revolting to the feelings of both; and though his inconstancy probably originated in the attractions of a fairer face, I could almost pardon an act for which both feeling and principle suggested so much in extenuation.

But similar indulgence was not to be expected from the Duchess. *Her* sacrifices were unrepaid; *her* expectations frustrated; nay, her very pride deeply and incurably wounded. Conscious that the world was expecting her union with Lord Pembury,—she knew that her disappointment would be guessed and afford matter of triumph to her enemies. A woman of forty years of age, is peculiarly sensitive on the score of her personal charms. *She* espies the first gray hair; the earliest wrinkle; the impaired lustre of her beauty, long before it becomes generally manifest; and aware that the approaching marriage of her daughters must place her in a position to incur the ridicule already showered from all sides upon the coquetry of her grandmother rival, Lady Jersey, she trembled at every fresh incident enregistered in evidence of her personal decay.

And to what, in such a juncture, could she turn for consolation? The memory of the past? Alas! was it not inscribed in letters of blood upon a tomb-stone in the chapel at Vere Court! The affection of her children? Alas! did she not truly admit, that in these she was supplanted; that she received, from their sense of duty, the tribute withheld by their feelings! Her position in the world? Was not even this precarious; hanging on the slender thread of a waning existence—the life of her idiotic son!

In pondering upon these things, I forgave the petulence of her letter. I saw how easy it was to construe mine into an insult; or at best into an attempt to deprive her of the two children vouchsafed as a consolation to her future loneliness. To her, these younger girls would soon be all in all; the comforters, perhaps, of many an hour of penitence and pain.

But would it indeed be so? Dared I hope that Maria and Susan De Vere would at last find a mother in the Duchess of Rochester? Of all moral gulphs most rare and difficult for human nature to overpass, is that which divides a woman of the world from the fulfilment of her duties! The atmosphere of vanity and frivolity becomes at last vital to her existence; and to wean her from the paltry ends and aims, the low ambitions, the trivial pride, which have so long caused the pulse to flutter, and the cheek to flush, is an effort demanding superhuman strength and encouragement! I opined, and justly, that the thoughts of the Duchess of Rochester were far more agitated with surmises concerning the new Lady Pembury, and projects for throwing the bride into eclipse, than by susceptibility on the score of Mrs. De Vere's influence over her daughters,—elder or younger! That Lord Pembury should introduce a lovely girl into society as his Countess, and claim for her the favour of Carlton House, and the admiration of the Devonshire and Gordon coteries, was a source of heart-break beyond even the rapid decay of the offspring of her guilt.

For that affliction, "there would be time hereafter." She felt that, after sinking into the discarded mistress, the time was approaching for her to become the obscure dowager. She, so long courted as the lady paramount of Vere Court and Rochester House; she, the idolized queen of

fashion; SHE, whom I had so lately esteemed an object of envy,—a minion of prosperity and peace!

Still, there was a bright side to the picture. The prospects of the three older girls afforded decided cause for exultation. Not a mother in London but envied her the homage of such sons-in-law, as the Lords Addenbrooke, Mount-Hardington, and Rawborne. With *them* were Mammon and Lucifer—riches and pride; and if driven in her own person from the field, she triumphed in the destinies of Isabella and her sisters. I could discern, indeed, the full value of the establishments my young cousins were about to form, in the vexation of certain manœuvring mothers of my acquaintance. The week following my return to Penderels, I dined at Hatfield House; and while apparently engaged in conversation after dinner with my friend Lady Salisbury, overheard the following edifying conversation between three or four of the female guests:

"Does any one know," said Lady R., a Herefordshire speciality of whose *mauvaise langue* I stood greatly in horror, "how many of the Duchess of Rochester's daughters are going to be married? A dozen, I conclude, if I am to judge from the provision of wedding-clothes I saw making for them last week at Nunn and Barber's."

"No doubt she is getting as many of them off her hands as she can," replied a good-natured friend. "She will come out quite young again, after disposing of the four or five eldest."

"I saw Lord Rawborne's family diamonds re-setting at Constable's for Lady Adeline, as I passed through town," observed one of the dowagers.

"Family diamonds!" reiterated Lady D. "Unredeemed pledges, you mean, from the house of Moses! The diamonds must have arrived with the last countess from Bevis Marks. The Rawbornes were never heard of in the world till *this* lord's time; and where is *he* known, pray, unless on the turf?"

"We must at least admit," interposed the Dowager Lady S——r, "that with so much matrimony going on around her, the Duchess has shown great prudence in avoiding the snare. It can have been but the interests of her daughters which determined her to refuse Lord Pembury."

"*Refuse* Lord Pembury!" ejaculated Lady R. "My very dear Lady S——r, with all your *bonne foi*, you cannot for a moment suppose he ever gave her the opportunity? Pemberry knows the Duchess a vast deal too well! *Who*, in fact, knows her half so well as Pembury? No! no! a more decided case of throwing over was never seen. I cannot give you credit for believing that the Duchess of Rochester would reject the hand of Lord Pembury!"

"Why not? We have been required to give faith to such miracles of mischief respecting this poor woman, that surely we may be charitable enough to allow her a single act of discretion?"

"Not in the face of all probability—all possibility!"

"When I find," answered Lady S——r, gravely, "that human nature is improved by the discouragement we give to virtue in withholding our good interpretation from *motives* where *actions* are unimpugnable, I will be as ready to deny and disbelieve as the rest of you. But I see nothing to be gained by the system of universal disparagement just now in fashion."

"Poor dear soul!" observed Lady R——, aside to the others, "how prosy she is growing! Trimmer-bitten, I protest!"

"Why assign high-sounding names to such very common-place proceedings?" said my neighbour, Mr. G——, who had just entered with the gentlemen, replying to the last observation of Lady S——r. "This is not the age of passion,—scarcely even of sentiment; but simply of routine and convenience. My friend Pembury found it expedient to pass his year of widowhood on his Irish estates; and his year of widowhood on his Irish estates proving dull and desolate, he found it expedient to put up with the society of the nearest parsonage. The nearest parsonage happened to contain a very pretty girl of eighteen; and having no positive engagement to the Duchess, what could be more simple than that he should convert Miss Ellen Power into the Countess of Pembury?"

"Such, then, are the circumstances of the case, stripped of all poetry and romance?" demanded Lady S——r.

"Oh! the poetry and the romance are of course to be supplied by her Grace," flippantly interposed Lady R., "the Ariadne, the Dido, nay, who knows? perhaps the

Medea of the tragedy! We shall have her sending the poor little Duke post-haste to Hades, after the attitude of Siddons in Glover's stupid play!"

"Fie, fie! my dear Lady R——," said Mr. G——, "what right have you to infer our Jason to be a papa?"

"The Duchess is so apt to grow ferocious when any thing offends her," replied Lady R——, not choosing to understand the reprimand. "The other day, when my cousin Lord Charles was staying at Vere Court, she refused the Duke of Sicignano for one of her girls, because he related a grim-goblin story in her presence, which she fancied bore direct or indirect allusion to herself."

"The match of Lady Isabella with Lord Addenbrooke has made her difficult," observed Mr. G——.

"But is that so sure?" cried Lady R——. "What does your Ladyship say?" she continued, addressing Lady S——r. "Do you think the Kincardines will consent to the union of their only son with a daughter of the Duchess of Rochester?"

"Much, I should imagine, would depend upon the daughter. Is she amiable—well brought up?"

"How can they know? Lord Addenbrooke, no doubt, writes them word she is an angel. But Lady Isabella must have been a child when they quitted England; and her mother not only a woman—a woman of the world—but a woman almost banished from society. They have every right to raise objections."

"My friend Lady Kincardine is, I admit, one of those whom the world styles righteous over-much; but in these days of general corruption, it would be wise to see," said Lady S——r, "that an early marriage affords one of the best preservatives for her son. Few of us are fortunate enough to exercise a right of selection for our children."

"*Nous verrons!*"—was the rejoinder of Lady R——. But already her prognostications had created an uneasy feeling in her mind. To a person of Isabella's sanguine temper, having every earthly hope of happiness concentrated in the fulfilment of her engagement to Lord Addenbrooke, I dared not anticipate the results of disappointment. When I could give ear again to the ill-natured comments of Lady R——, Carlton House had become the subject of her animadversions, and the conversation was general.

"Such a falling off from our grand expectations!"—I heard her say. "The Princess of Wales, who was to afford a new model for our fashions, our manners, our pleasures,—and to relieve us from the quizzicalities of Windsor and Buckingham House;—*who* for an instant could have supposed the pride of our divine Prince would turn out a vulgar hoyden!"

"'Vulgar' is a term of such purely conventional value," observed Lady S——r, "that I am still to learn how far our reprobation ought to extend. That which denotes good breading at the court of Berlin, might probably pass for 'vulgar' at the court of Naples;—for if climate, as Montesquieu assures us, operates upon the *laws* of a people, how much rather upon its customs?—The Princess of Wales comes to us with all the frank artlessness of a Northern German; and we judge her after the cold model of calm artificial St. James's!—Is this fair?"

"We judge her rather by the feelings she excites," observed Lady R——. "One can hardly explain the grounds of every opinion one takes up concerning those one meets in society. We see them,—converse with them,—converse *of* them,—and decide within ourselves that they are wise or foolish, right or wrong, without much to bring forward in justification of our opinion. The very few times I have visited the Princess at Carlton House or met her elsewhere, impress a conviction on my mind that she is coarse and foolish; yet I have not one fact to cite in support of my belief!"[13]

"You may be very right," replied her sager friend; "and when time *proves* you so, I will applaud your discernment. Meanwhile, suffer me to compassionate in silence the fate of one whose path appears to be strewn with roses; from which the hands that ostentatiously scatter them, have certainly forgotten to remove the thorns!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The season was now becoming one of general anxiety. The expected birth of an Heir Presumptive imparted considerable interest in the eyes of the world to those domestic feuds of Carlton House, which might have been regarded under other circumstances as the early squabbles of an ill-assorted couple, whose tempers were violent and judgment weak; when it reached the public, through remote echoes of the gossip of the courtiers, that the Princess of Wales, about to become a mother, had insisted on the dismissal of Lady Jersey, and insisted in vain.

It was now made a matter of universal discommendation, that her Royal Highness should be denied

> The child-bed privilege which 'longs
> To women of all stations,

of selecting, at such a moment, her own *entourage*. The discord of the newly-married pair considered, it was pretty generally inferred that the expected offspring would prove the last; and that on the approaching event hung all hope of succession from the elder branch of the House of Brunswick.

Great, therefore, was the disappointment of the public when, early in the month of January, the brith of a Princess, at Carlton House, dismissed the great officers of state from an attendance, which we had hoped would certify the advent of a Prince George, instead of a Princess Charlotte. For who could anticipate the interest hereafter to be excited in the country, by the fine frank English character of that

> Fair-haired daughter of the Isles?

She came unwelcomed. Her birth brought not with it the customary promise of "boys hereafter." Already disunion existed between the parents of a babe whose birth occurred within their first year of wedded union. The

King, when he came to offer his benediction to the cradle of this new generation of his dynasty, was met with tears on the part of a young mother, who ought to have been experiencing the highest exultation of womanly triumph; and smiles of cold disdain from his son, in whose bosom indifference was now soured into disgust. A very few weeks of matrimony had put a period to his efforts at surmounting the contrarieties of his position; and now, no secrecy was even affected in His Royal Highness's resolve to be henceforward the least conjugal of married men. It was in vain that Lord and Lady Cholmondeley exercised their good intentions as mediators:—the tares that had taken root in the royal *menage* were never more to be extirpated.

It was from the public papers, meanwhile, that I was fated to learn the retirement of Lady Isabella de Vere from the household of the Princess of Wales. Eager as I felt to know whether the measure was consequent upon the approach of her union with Lord Addenbrooke, or simply an act of her own will, (for Isabella had just attained her majority,) I had no means of ascertaining the truth. The Duchess and her family were at Brighthelmstone, a place with which I had not only no connexion, but which was now deserted in consequence of the establishment of the Prince and Princess of Wales for the winter at Carlton House; and the determination of his Royal Highness to estrange himself from past recollections and present vexations, by passing the ensuing summer at the Grange, in Hampshire. When I mingled in the gay society of my own country, our conversation was engrossed by topics connected with the irritation of the public mind: the insults offered to the Queen by hoisting a tri-coloured flag over the Tower of London during the celebration of her birth-day, and by a stone flung into her carriage [redacted] returned from a visit to Drury-lane theatre. Roy[redacted] just then under a cloud. The French princes ha[redacted] at Holyrood; unhappy emigrants, with neither [redacted] to support their dignity nor dignity to support their means; while our own Prince,—our own future Sovereign,—laden with the benefactions of the country, was not only involved in ruinous law-suits with usurious creditors, but imagined himself under the necessity of declining the official con-

gratulations of the city of London on the birth of the Heiress Presumptive of the empire, on the plea of having an establishment insufficient to receive with becoming form the visit of the civic officers and their train!

On the Continent, meanwhile, republicanism was not only gaining strength, but gaining ground. The name of Bonaparte found its way for the first time to England, in connexion with the invading army about to pour from the summit of the Alps upon the plains of Italy; and the intelligence of that prodigious movement brought with it a thousand terrors for my family. Hitherto, notwithstanding the lowering aspect of affairs, Mrs. Mordaunt had resolutely refused to quit Italy; but on the occasion of the address of the French Directory to the armies of France previously to carrying the war into Piedmont, Henry became peremptory, and it was settled that Clara and her boy should sail from Genoa by a British merchant-vessel. But the season was unpropitious; and Britannia, though just then "ruling the waves" with the united vigour of a Howe, a Hood, a Duncan, a Jervis, a Nelson, and a Pellew, was not yet so invincible as to render the departure of his wife and child, a matter of less than poignant anxiety to my brother. I received a letter from him, written some days after the agitation of the project, in which he spoke of causing them to traverse Spain, in preference to braving the hazards of the Mediterranean at such a crisis.

The jeopardy of Henry and his family ought perhaps, to have absorbed my whole interest. Nevertheless, I could not help feeling angry with my brother for his unkind silence relative to the position and projects of my cousin Algernon. How could I tell but that Mr. Rawborne, so long acclimatized in Italy might feel sufficiently rooted in the soil to enrol himself in her defence? How could I feel sure that, weary of inaction, he might not take arms under the Italian banner, against the common foe of Italy and [illegible]?

It occurred to me, that the foreign correspondence of the Duke of Sicignano might possibly place him in possession of further information. Yet with the scrupulousness which had long marked every movement of mine having Algernon remotely or proximately for its object, I dared not address him on the subject; and at length, with true feminine arti-

fice, made up a party at Penderels on the strength of a ball about to be given at Lammers Park; among other invitations for which, I despatched one to the Neapolitan Ambassador. Still, I was disappointed. The urgency of his diplomatic avocations at such a crisis rendered it impossible for him to quit town; and I was forced to go through with my party, and play the cheerful and hospitable hostess, while the individual for whom my civilities were intended remained a denizen of the parish of St. James.

Meanwhile, the alarmists pursued the ringing of their tocsin; the daily journals contributing to the public panic all the sinister prognostics that the blackest ink could conjure up. Although the army of the King of Sardinia amounted to sixty thousand men, while the Papal States and those of the King of Naples were actively embodying their available troops, little doubt was entertained in England that the hardy, resolute, and enthusiastic soldiers of France would succeed against the enervated and discontented Italian mercenaries. The Austrians, under the command of a general already unfortunate in the Netherlands in more than one encounter with the French, seemed to promise an insufficient support; and interested as I was in comprehending every shade and contingency of the affair, I already anticipated for the troops of Bonaparte those fatal triumphs, which formed so wide a basis for the future wars of the predestined enemy of the British nation.

In my folly,—the folly of a woman nourishing at her heart's core a sentiment interdicted by her reason,—I fancied that my friends were watching to detect in my countenance and demeanour, indications of the anxiety of my mind. I would not so much as open a newspaper in the presence of my servants, in the absurd conviction, that they would see written in my inquiring eyes the names of "Venice," or "Algernon;" and when at length I determined on passing a few days in town for the prosecution of my inquiries, I placed my departure from Penderels to the account of a dentist, a mantua-maker, or some such idle pretext; fearing, as none but a woman or a maniac would have dreamed of fearing, that my brother and housekeeper were as much occupied as myself with the destinies of the Cisalpine Littoral, and the warlike intentions of the Honourable Algernon Rawborne!

But accountable as one feels in a circumscribed country establishment to the little knot of domestic spies called upper servants, in the publicity of a London hotel I felt privileged to despatch a note to Sicignano, without fear of the animadversions of my housekeeper's room; and while the Duke's object in hastening to accept my invitation was to obtain some intelligence respecting Isabella and her mother, *mine* was speedily fulfilled by the readiness with which he informed me that Algernon had already quitted Venice. The friend whose letter incidentally communicated the fact, added that he had left them on the honourable mission of escorting a defenceless woman to her native country; and neither the Duke nor myself hesitated to affix to the fair one to whose protection he had devoted himself, the name of Alidea di Viscounti!

It might be, that the irritation of mind with which I lent myself to this supposition, imparted unusual *aigreur* to my feelings, for it certainly was not my wont to be unmindful of the susceptibility of others; but when, after fully gratifying my curiosity, the Duke proceeded to satisfy his own by a thousand interrogations concerning the Duchess, I fear I

Answered him slightingly, I know not what.

—Unwilling to make a merit in his eyes of my championship as the origin of dissensions between myself and my imperious kinswoman, I merely avowed in reply to his impassioned apostrophe that I feared he must resign himself to the decree of the Duchess. But in admitting even thus much of my opinion, I had not sufficiently calculated on the character of Sicignano. I, whose experience of the passions of the human breast, lay chiefly among that class of my own countrymen who *think* so much more deeply than they *feel*,—I, who had seen Fitzirnham for so long a period, and Algernon for a period much longer, impose silence on their sentiments for myself, while Sir Claude Lovell and Sir Robert Warley had needed scarcely more than a hint of my indifference to withdraw their suit at once and for ever,—*I*, could scarcely enter into the intensity of passion governing the soul of the young Neapolitan! A hint sufficed not *him*.—Scarcely had I let fall a sugges-

tion that it were wiser to abandon his pretensions, than he burst forth into such violence as caused me to repent my indiscretion;—insisted on knowing the worst, or knowing all; till I was at last obliged to remedy one rashness by a greater, and admit that the sisters of Lady Helena regarded his cause as lost!

At that word, the vehemence of the Duke subsided as by some magic influence. A deathlike pallor overspread his face, while he interrogated me anew, with less impetuosity but the deepest feeling.

"Were I not apprehensive of giving you pain," I began,—but hesitated: watching his countenance for encouragement——

"No fears, I beseech you, on that head!" interrupted Sicignano. "I have deceived myself; it were an act of cruelty did others continue to deceive me! All I desire now is to see things in their true light. I trust I have sense and fortitude to bear even a greater misfortune than the loss of a woman's liking."

"Since you are so reasonable," I replied, "I will not hesitate to avow that Isabella and Adeline, the confidants of their sister, are of opinion that she has wholly resigned herself to the authority of her mother; and that in time she will probably"—

"No! no more!" interrupted the Duke in a faint voice, seizing me by the arm. "I have heard enough to undeceive my fruitless expectations; do not let me learn what would break my heart."

My surprise at this sudden change of tone was painted in my looks; while Sicignano by a strong effort, recovered his self-possession. "It is all for the best!" cried he, with a forced smile. "I could never have submitted to a mother-in-law so imperious as the Duchess of Rochester. England is the garden of beauty; and if I determine to show my courage and dare the oracle by giving away my heart and hand in the far island, I have but to throw them into the air at the first ball at court, they will probably light upon a head as fair as that of Lady Helena de Vere!"

And he indulged in a laugh that was anything but mirthful.

"We abound in better things than beauty," said I.

"I am no fortune-hunter," replied the Duke.

"In well-educated and highly-principled women, who promise every excellence as wives," I persisted. "The present generation of English girls have been reared after a better system than their mothers and grandmothers."

"Admit that there was room for improvement!" said the Duke; "I shall wait till the daughters of Lady Carlisle, or perhaps till even those of the Duchess of Devonshire, are old enough for love and matrimony. Or if my mortification should press too hard, there are still fair Villierses, fair Gordons, to be wooed and won. In short, do not pity me too much."

His tone of pleasantry did not deceive me. I saw that Sicignano was deeply wounded; and after his departure, almost regretted that I had ventured to withdraw the veil from his eyes.

But it was not of the Duke of Sicignano I had now to think: it was of Algernon; it was of myself. Since my cousin was sufficiently devoted to the Countess Visconti to become her escort in the face of the world, abandoning his adopted home and country for her sake, it was clear that his preference was of a higher character than the mere levity of a *liaison*. He must dearly love her; I could not doubt that he dearly loved her. Let the destinies of Italy be annihilated or strengthened by the successes of the French, *there* was evidently his abiding place; he had altogether forgotten England, he had altogether forgotten his cousin.

Such, and so dispiriting, were my prospects; and in despair at the notion of shutting myself up at Penderels with my tribulation, I resolved to set off immediately for Ailesfort Castle; for scarcely a week elapsed without my receiving from Helen the most urgent invitations. I was in the act of writing to announce to my sister that I was on the point of departure for the north, when a letter in a handwriting I could scarcely recognise, was placed in my hand, imploring me in the name of all my affection for themselves; all my gratitude towards their uncle, to proceed to Brighthelmstone. It needed not the signatures of Isabella and Helena to tell me that it was my cousins who needed my good offices; and as at such a suggestion I was willing to defy even the arrogance of their mother, I laid aside my despatches for Lady Ailesfort, and caused my horses' heads to be turned towards the Brighton road.

CHAPTER XIV.

This unexpected journey to Brighthelmstone insured a day of perplexed thoughts and painful emotions. My mind wandered back through the lapse of years to that humiliating period when I had quitted the spot, rescued by the affectionate interposition of Algernon Rawborne from the treachery of my aunt; and the recollection of her unprincipled conduct on that occasion, almost justified the vague surmises of evil I began to entertain on account of her daughters. I reproached myself that I had not more peremtorily exercised the authority bequeathed to my hands by Lord Hugh, seconded as it was by my peculiar position with regard to herself.

There was something to try my patience in the idea of the Duchess of Rochester, throned triumphant in her scorn, and having surmounted by the force of audacity such overwhelming obstacles. She had conciliated me at first by the amendment of her maternal dispositions; but in her recent conduct towards Isabella and Helena, she seemed to have forgotten herself, and me, and them. I prepared myself to find the girls suffering under some new severity; to learn perhaps on my arrival, that Lord Addenbrooke had been dismissed with as little ceremony as the Duke of Sicignano; or that she was insisting on the immediate union of Helena with Lord Mount-Hardington.

It was evening when I reached Brighthelmstone; and having taken up my abode at the hotel, I despatched a note to Helena to inquire whether her mother was in a state of mind to admit of my presenting myself at her residence. The poor girl's reply was contained in the following incoherent lines.

"Thank you, thank you, for coming so soon. We expect you. My poor mother is not likely even to notice your arrival. H. De V."

Thus encouraged, I hastened to the house —— Helena, who was in waiting to receive me, threw herself into my arms, and mingled tears with her embraces, in congratulating herself on my arrival; and having entered the draw-

ing-room on her arm, I found Lady Isabella reclining on the sofa, in a state of great indisposition and debility, with Adeline sitting by her side, holding in her own the hand of the pale and anxious-looking invalid.

"Dearest child! you have been ill, and without giving me a word of warning?" said I bending over Isabella, and imprinting a kiss on her feverish cheek.

"I shall be better now you are come!" she faltered in reply. "I want some one to inspire me with wisdom—with fortitude; and these dear sisters of mine can give me only such soothing consolation as encourages me to bewail my affliction rather than meet it as I ought."

"My dear Isabella, I *must* hazard giving you pain by my inquiries! I know not even the nature of your distress?"

"The extinction of my happiness for life!" replied my young cousin, attemping a melancholy smile. "Nothing more."

"The answer from India?"

"Unfavourable—more than unfavourable," whispered Lady Adeline, placing her arm round my waist as we stood together watching the countenance of her sister. "Lord and Lady Kincardine have expressed themselves in terms so insulting towards mamma, that Isabella feels it her duty not only to submit without a murmur, but even to expose herself to no further interview with Addenbrooke."

"But what could tempt Lord Addenbrooke to exhibit to your sister any letter containing the condemnation of your mother?"

"He was with us when the packet reached him; and his surprise in perusing its contents became unconcealable. Addenbrooke was so convinced, too, that certain expressions used by Lady Kincardine must originate in some error—some misunderstanding—that he expressed his conviction to that effect in presence of my mother. But alas! poor mamma's emotion clearly proved that *she* understood the purport of the accusation so much a mystery to ourselves."

"Unhappy woman!"

"It is surely *I* who have the best claim to your compassion!" said Isabella, turning her languid face towards me. "*I* have never offended these people, am incapable of offending them. Nay, judging by Lady Kincardine's

letters to her son, I am convinced that few persons would have suited her so well as a daughter-in-law. She demanded a submissive disposition, and mine, Heaven knows, has been tutored to submission !"

"When Lady Kincardine becomes personally acquainted with you"———I began.

"Never,—we shall never become acquainted !" cried Isabella. "After the expressions used by Lord and Lady Kincardine towards my family, I could never love and respect them as parents. They are not likely to visit England for years. Thank Heaven, we shall never meet."

"And how did poor Addenbrooke support his disappointment ?" I inquired.

"He quitted Brighthelmstone, poor fellow! almost in a state of frenzy. The blow fell upon him so unexpectedly ! He had been preparing every thing for his marriage, persuaded that his choice would gratify the fondest expectations of his family."

"And whither is he gone ?"

"His projects, alas! are those of a madman," faltered Lady Isabella. "He is bent upon sailing for India with the first fleet, to combat by personal argument the opposition of his parents."

"It is on this head, dear Mrs. De Vere, we hope for your assistance," interposed Lady Helena. "It is you alone who will bring him to reason. Isabella will not hear of his incurring the peril and annoyance of such a voyage, for a purpose pre-assured of failure. What arguments *could* he use to alter the opinions of Lord and Lady Kincardine ? That he loves Lady Isabella De Vere to distraction ? They know it, and disregard it ! The calumnies they have allowed themselves to utter, *he* has no means to refute. Circumstances which occurred fifteen years ago, must always be better known to *them* than *us*."

"And even were we able to prove their falsehood," said Isabella, "the disposition to harshness shown by the Marquess and his wife, has extinguished all inclination on my part to enter their family. It is only poor Addenbrooke's distress of mind I have now to consider," she continued, "*Chère bonne-maman !* Promise me to see him !—promise me to reconcile him to our change of prospects !"

I endeavoured to re-assure her with those vague en-

courageements we are apt to offer to the unhappy; but they did not deceive Isabella.

"No, no!" she replied, pressing my hand with grateful tenderness to her lips; "I see the kindness of your intention: but you do not deceive me. Deep as is the injury offered to my mother, bitter the affliction to myself, it is time I should rouse myself to the facts and realities of the case."

"And the Duchess?" I inquired, turning towards Helena,—"is she aware of your having written to me?"

"She is aware of nothing!——Henry is in a hopeless state; I should say in his last moments, but that for this fortnight past, we have expected every day would put an end to his sufferings."

"He suffers, then?"

"It is impossible to see a human creature more miserably afflicted. But mamma's tenderness for him, even in this dreadful state, is without bounds. She never leaves his side; but sits watching his tortures, as if every pang were more agonizing to *her* than to her son."

"Have you courage," said I, "to apprize her of my arrival? I must not be a clandestine inmate of her house."

"We have courage to tell her of anything now," replied Lady Adeline. "Poor mamma is so subdued, that her worst enemy would behold her with compassion."

She proceeded accordingly to execute my mission, and instantly brought back from my aunt an earnest entreaty to see me. Even to the girls, I dared not avow my repugnance to enter the presence of the young duke; still less would I have made it perceptible to his unhappy mother; but when, leaning on the arm of Lady Adeline, I proceeded to his apartments, I paused on the threshold trembling at the prospect of the spectacle.

I expected violence—shrieks—outcries. Alas! on entering the room, I beheld only the attenuated form of a fair boy, extended in a state of stupor upon his couch; on a chair beside, sat the Duchess, motionless, rigid, her eyes fixed upon the face of the dying child. As I approached and she became conscious of my presence, she extended her hand affectionately without turning her looks towards me; and the words that escaped her parched lips were scarcely intelligible. I motioned to my companion to

leave us; feeling that the Duchess might wish to receive me alone, at such a crisis of humiliation.

"Look at him," faltered she, as Helena quitted the room, pointing to the sharpened features of the ill-fated being before us, whose existence had been one long disease. "A few hours more, and the object which for twelve long years has engrossed every impulse of my anxious soul, will be dust! God has heavily punished me, Lizzy; punished me where my heart was sorest. I ought to have loved those girls! They were good, beautiful, affectionate; I have cared only for this afflicted, unhappy boy."

"You will have the girls to love and to console you, when he is no more," was all I could venture to utter in reply.

"No! they are lost to me for ever!" ejaculated the Duchess. "That letter from India revealed all the secrets of the past. They are still dutiful,—still submissive; but they cannot in their hearts feel towards me as before."

"Pardon me! Words to which *you* may affix significance, have no meaning for *their* interpretation. Isabella understands nothing of the Kincardines' accusations, except that they purport some offence to *you*, and consequently to herself. Of her own free will, she assured me that no future concessions would induce her to enter a family, the members of which had spoken injuriously of her mother."

"Did she say so?" demanded the Duchess, turning towards me a countenance so changed with suffering that I could scarcely recognise the features.

"She said more, and was fully supported by her sisters."

"Poor girls! poor children! They have not yet mingled indiscriminately with the world, to learn all that will be hereafter unfolded to them by malicious tongues. I have done you grievous wrong, Lizzy. I always fancied you had been more communicative to them of the past than the ties of kindred between us could justify. I do you justice now. I feel that you have not been my enemy with my daughters. I have been my own,—always my own."

A convulsive start from the young Duke diverted her attention:—a start followed by the recurrence of total insensibility.

"Poor, precious, miserable outcast!" faltered the Duchess, wiping the cold dew from his wasted forehead; "but for his occasional tortures, I should scarcely know that he still breathed. Look at him,—helpless,—almost lifeless; and admire how little an all-just God has permitted him to profit by wealth and titles, *his* only in virtue of my falsehood. Poor Henry! better for him to have been the hardy healthy offspring of some honest labourer, than spring from the gilded couch of sin. The jealous hand of the Almighty has overtaken us!"

I strove to divert her attention from herself by inquiries concerning the medical advisers of the young Duke.

"They have done nothing for him; they could do nothing for him. They have not spared him a pang!" said she, with a sudden burst of irritation. "This morning I dismissed them all from their attendance; they came only to pry into my wretchedness. But I was wrong!" said she, dashing away the tears from her cheek, "this house is marked for their prey. I shall only have to recall them. They must come to dismiss my poor Isabella in due form and ceremony to the grave. The girl will die, Mrs. De Vere; I know her tenderness of heart. A few months of fretting, and all will be over with her. She will never survive the blow she has received."

"Do not anticipate evil: you have, alas! only too many misfortunes present with you!" said I, "Lady Isabella is the most generous of human beings; and the happiness of her two sisters will restore her peace of mind."

"The happiness of her sisters!" ejaculated the Duchess, "Alas! on how sandy a foundation does it rest! I see things no longer as I once beheld them. My pride is crushed—my vanity withered. I would fain bequeath to those children less cause to curse my memory. I would fain secure their destinies on a firmer footing. You, Lizzy, are unbiassed by personal prejudices. While you remain with us, apply your clear judgment to study the feelings of Helena; and should you find her preference of the Duke of Sicignano as you once esteemed it irrevocable, I leave it to your kindness to bring them together. So far from persisting to press upon her the addresses of Lord Mount-Hardington, it depends only on you and them for Sicignano to obtain my consent."

All this I readily promised; and even comforted her by compliance with her earnest entreaties that, for the present, I would remain an inmate under her roof.

"The girls stand in need of an adviser and protectress!" said she, "for, alas, I am nothing, less than nothing, to them now!" And leaning over the young Duke, she impressed a silent kiss on his unconcious forehead. Then suddenly recollecting that I must be tired with my journey, she kindly dismissed me for the night; and seemed to receive as a favour the embrace I did not hesitate to bestow on the humbled and afflicted woman.

This, then, was the end of all her manœuvres,—all her faults,—all her follies,—all her sins! On every side humiliation: on every side punishment. I could bring to mind no human being labouring under a heavier measure of divine wrath. My only trust was to preserve the girls from participating more than was inevitable in the harshness of her destinies. Whatever might befal her on the death of the Duke,—and there was reason to fear that her former inconsiderate prodigality would plunge her into immediate difficulties,—I had still a home to shelter them, and tenderness to render it a happier one to them than to myself.

I retired to rest oppressed by these contemplations, and the projects to which they gave rise; resolving to seek an immediate conference with Lady Helena and determine her dispositions towards the Duke of Sicignano for the government of my own interference between them.

Very early, however, on the following morning, and long before I was restored in either mind or body from the fatigues of the preceding day, I was roused by my attendant from a heavy sleep; and instantly discerned in her countenance tokens of dismay.

"Is all over?" cried I, starting up.

"I hope not, I humbly trust not!" she replied. "But there is no hope; you will scarcely be there in time, Madam, to see him alive."

Referring her reply to my own question, which regarded the young Duke of Rochester, I threw on my dressing-gown in haste, and was preparing to follow her to the presence of the Duchess; when the embarrassment of the poor woman proved that some misunderstanding existed. But an explanation was easily sought,—easily afforded.

More troubles, more perplexities! My poor father was upon his death-bed. An express had been despatched to Penderels; had followed me to London,—to Brighton. Mrs. Mordaunt and Richard entreated my immediate presence.

"I have not a word to urge against such an appeal!" faltered the Duchess, tears streaming down her face, when she found me on the point of departure. "Go, Lizzy! fulfil your duties as you have ever fulfilled them; and reap your reward, as heretofore, in the love of all belonging to you. Leave me to this bed of death and suffering; without one friend or hope to cheer me in my afflictions."

In taking leave of the girls, there was no need to impress upon their minds the necessity of devoting their utmost solicitude to their mother. All the attention that Helena and Adeline could spare from Isabella, would I knew be devoting their utmost solicitude to their mother. All the attention that Helena and Adeline could spare from Isabella, would I knew be devoted to the Duchess; all the exertion that the enfeebled condition of poor Isabella would admit, was sure to be dedicated to the unhappy source of her sorrows. It was impossible for the most dutiful of daughters to be more considerate towards a parent than those neglected girls. But not even filial tenderness, the most soothing of all earthly endearments, sufficed to calm the stings of a reproving conscience, or to brighten the darkness of a self-condemned eternity!

CHAPTER XV.

I DID not loiter on my journey. The weather, a mild close of the month of March, which seemed rather to belong to April, was propitious to my haste; and early on the following morning, I reached the lodge-gates of Spetchingley. One word from the porter sufficed to re-assure me; the old man, my father, was yet alive!

Happy auspices seemed to influence the season and the scene! The park lay silent in the sunshine, the leafless avenues apparently waited but a signal to put forth their verdure. The old hall at a distance, looked tranquil and full of venerable sadness, as if conscious that the master-spirit was passing away; no servants were loitering round the house, no gardeners busy in the shrubberies. I would not suffer the carriage to drive up, lest the noise might disturb my father; but alighting, entered the court-yard on foot. Poor Ladybird, asleep in the sunshine, looked up wistfully as I passed; apprized by the discomposure of her habits of daily attendance on the Squire, that something was amiss.

The nature of my father's disorder having produced considerable oppression, he was not able to rest in a recumbent position; but sat propped by pillows dozing in his arm-chair, when I entered the room with Mrs. Mordaunt. My worthy cousin was seated at a little distance, his hands on his knees, and with a face of deep concern; without a book, without an occupation, save the predominant interest of watching the decline of the squire, on whose life he had so religiously attended. My brother, the Archdeacon, was expected every moment from the Rectory for his daily visit of spiritual and filial ministration; while Richard never left the house, rarely even the chamber of the invalid.

Having already learned from Mrs. Mordaunt, that my poor father's hours were numbered, the physicians having decided that he would not survive the day, I was content to see him slumber on so tranquilly, satisfied that his suffer-

ings must be inconsiderable. He awoke up at length, refreshed and peaceful, with a smile for Mrs. Mordaunt, a smile for Dick, and a burst of affectionate self-gratulation, when they prepared him for my sudden appearance, by informing him that his eldest daughter was come from Penderels to visit him.

"Welcome, Lizzy, to Spetchingley; welcome, for the last time!" murmured my poor father, as I knelt at his feet. "I told you when you left us, girl, you would have *once* more to come at the summons of the old man. Lately, however, I had not thought to see you again. A day or two ago, I fancied all was up with me; but these kind souls have been so thoughtful, so tender, watching over me as a mother would her infant; and so you see, I am spared to give you my blessing before I die. Where's young Algernon Mordaunt? Where's Harry's boy? Has his aunt seen him? Isn't he grown? Lizzy, hasn't he a look of his father about the eyes? Do you know, Lizzy, I've been dreaming all night of my son. I fancied we were walking together over the home-farm, as we did twenty years agone, when Lady Betty used to be angry with me for keeping the lad out in the dew; and we went into the paddock where the old bay hunter, and grey Peggy, your poor mother's favourite mare, were turned out to grass; and I wanted Harry to"———

"You must not tire yourself with talking, sir; the Doctor says we mustn't let you tire yourself with talking," interposed Dick Mordaunt, in whose eyes the tears were gathering, as he listened to the broken voice and oppressed breathing of the Squire. "We shall send Mrs. De Vere back again to Hertfordshire, if she encourages you to talk."

My father placed *his* hand caressingly on the hard brown hand of Dick, which leant on the arm of the chair as he hung over his friend.

"Call her Lizzy, my boy!" said he. "Your cousin is your cousin, though not to be your wife. Lizzy! I've no great fancy for that name of De Vere; 'tis one that never was a credit to the family; and since you don't care to take up again with the old one of Mordaunt," he continued, perceiving that poor Dick, thus abruptly apostrophized, had quitted the room,—"the sooner you fix on that of some honest man who will help you to make an honour-

able figure in the world, and be a stay and comfort to your declining years, the better. I would fain have you marry again."

Unwilling to thwart my father at such a time, I promised to dispose myself for the adoption of his advise; and certainly if any thing could tend to advocate the case of matrimony, it would have been the prevalence of "the ruling passion strong in death," manifested by my father. He could not bear his excellent wife to be out of his sight; he had patience with nothing that was not administered by her hand. In spite of his fond affection for his children and grandchildren, and more than kinsmanly attachment to Dick Mordaunt, it was in the looks of his wife only there shone that light of comfort from which his last moments extracted consolation.

My brother Richard came at last; his attention diverted from his dying father by his ceremonious welcome to myself,—his fears lest I should suffer from fatigue, his anxiety that I should retire and take some rest; receiving me, *not* as his sister Lizzy, but as Mrs. De Vere of Penderels Park. I was glad when his mechanical recitation of the daily service was at an end. To *me* there was more of religion in the broken words of tender thankfulness and patient resignation, uttered by the poor old Squire, than in all the studied phraseology of the Archdeacon.

"Lizzy," said my father, when, having dismissed Mrs. Mordaunt and Dick to take some repose, he found himself alone with me, whom he fancied more intimately the friend of my brother than the rest of the family;—"they tell me Harry Mordaunt will soon be coming home,—that the French will soon be masters in Italy. I could have wished to set eyes on him once more, and give up his boy to his hands. But, God's will be done! you will tell him for me, Lizzy, that I died blessing him, and praying, that even as he did unto me, the Almighty may do unto him, and more also.—May his children prove a lasting joy to him, as mine have proved to me. Say, if you think of it, that I recommend to his kindness the old servants and labourers. I have begged to have six of them carry the poor Squire to his grave. No display—no fine horsesand plumes,—for old Mordaunt of Spetchingley, that was snatched from beggary by the worthiness of his son.

Let my own people attend, and no other; they have been good servants to me,—God send that I prove not to have been a bad master to them."

I begged him to desist from these trying allusions; but he chose to be heard to the end.

"And you will tell Harry, I could wish Addington to get the renewal of his lease upon easy terms. Old Addington was out with me as a boy my first day's hunting sixty years back, the first fence that ever I cleared! It seems but yesterday! Don't forget to say a word for old Addington."

"Make yourself easy, dearest father: Henry will take care of him."

"And if my son wouldn't take it amiss," he resumed, "I should like poor Ladybird to go to Dick Mordaunt; she's not the dog old Ladybird was before her, so that Harry will never miss her. But Dick's used to the beast and the beast to him; and when September comes, I should like her to be in Spetchingley woods again, though the old man——"

He paused. Nature would have its way; and the tears long gathered in his eyes, dropped upon my hand.

"I know I am wrong to think of such things at such a time," he resumed at length. "My son Richard would reprove me, if he knew I was thinking of dogs and leases, when my affections ought to be elsewhere. But one can't help it, Lizzy. And now let's talk of better things."

We *did* talk of better things; and I found my father's frame of mind greatly to be envied; full of Faith, Hope, Charity, yet humble as became the humility of a Christian. He reviled himself with the oversights which occasioned his long banishment from the house of his ancestors; but his life had in fact been one of as blameless a tenour as is consistent with the frailty of mortal nature.

Towards evening, he rallied; excited as it was supposed by the sight of his daughter Lizzy. He had expressly desired that Jane and Helen, settled at so great a distance from Spetchingley, might not be sent for; he had insisted only on seeing the favourite child of Lady Betty. I wrote however to apprize my sisters of the change that was taking place, and entertained little doubt they would hold it a sacred duty to hasten to Spetchingley.

What a touching spectacle was it to behold the labourers crowding to the gate, to inquire after their friend and benefactor! Not a sound was to be heard in the house; not a whistle or cry of joy in the fields, in the fear of creating disquiet for the Squire. The second day after my arrival was the Sabbath; and when prayers were demanded by my brother of the congregation in Spetchingley church, "for one labouring under grievous bodily affliction," not an individual present but bent the knee; while many a gray head was bowed down with sorrow to know, that the snares of death were encompassing their good old Squire.

That night was one of exceeding restlessness,—exceeding pain. My father dozed at intervals, only to be awoke by distressing dreams; and careful as we had all been to abstain from referring in his presence to the hazards experienced by Clara and her son, some instinct seemed to acquaint him that something was amiss. In his sleep, he constantly murmured the names of Henry and the boys.

"That my eyes could but have rested upon him once again! Oh! that my eyes could rest once more upon my son! I heard him secretly ejaculate, with how little idea that the last wish of the good old man was to be fulfilled! Early on the following day, I heard the sound of an approaching carriage; and discerning from the window, a post-chaise and four in the avenue, I concluded it was the Rothesburys who, using the utmost speed, might reach Spetchingley in reply to my letter.

My father turned his eyes inquiringly towards me, as I returned from the window.

"One of my sisters, sir, I hope and believe," said I, in answer to his mute interrogation.

"Poor Helen! poor Jane! they ought not to have been disturbed from their happy homes," he faltered. "I can scarcely see them now; scarcely hear their voices."—

That moment, little Algernon Mordaunt who sat reading at his grandfather's feet, started up exclaiming, "I hear Papa's voice! Yes! I hear Papa's footsteps!"

"Hush, hush!" said I, perceiving that the mere conjecture had brought a hectic flush into my father's face, and that his hands trembled with agitation.

"It *is* my papa; I say it *is* my papa!" persisted the

child, as the door was gently opened, and my brother Henry, his countenance overpowered with emotion, glided towards my father. Conscious that the old man ought to have been prepared, I felt that Henry would have done wisely to cause himself to be announced. But it was too late now. The servants had told him Mr. Mordaunt was in the agonies of death; that it had been his sole desire to behold him; and Henry lost not a second. He was already there; already at the feet of his father.

The old man made a last effort to lay his hand upon the head of his idolized son, and in the attempt fell back breathless! A smile of inexpressible delight was imprinted on his venerable face as it gave way before the relaxing touch of death; and when we knelt down around him and commended his spirit to the Almighty, we felt that it had been his fate to depart in a moment of happiness unalloyed.

It needed not the exhortation of the Archdeacon to assure us that such is the death of the just!

CHAPTER XVI.

All was ordered at Spetchingley after the manner indicated by my father; and his whole family repaired thither once more, re-united, to lay his gray hairs with honour in the grave. His coffin was borne by his own people; was followed by his own children; but it was followed also by a voluntary procession of the neighbouring gentry from a distance of thirty miles round. The manner in which Mr. Mordaunt had given himself up to personal mortification and privation, for the re-establishment of his affairs, had won respect from all classes of his Leicestershire neighbours; and Mrs. Mordaunt had the heartfelt consolation of knowing that, in spite of intervening clouds, the star of her husband's life had set in greater lustre than was promised even by its rising brightness.

It was under grievous auspices, meanwhile, that my brother was welcomed to his inheritance. As soon as we could withdraw our thoughts from the afflicting scene at home, I had to listen to poor Henry's alarms at the non-arrival of Clara and his son, whom he had expected to find in England; and whose risks as travellers on the Continent at such a crisis, were of a far from trivial nature.

"Nevertheless," observed my brother, "with so kind and wise a protector, I feel my poor wife to be as secure of care and consideration, as though I were myself by her side."

"I rejoice to hear it; I was not aware," said I, "that you had been enabled to intrust your family to confidential hands?"

"Have you not heard, then," cried he, "that my friend Rawborne, on learning my dilemma, set off for Turin, and undertook the charge of conveying his cousins to England?"

"Just the active spirit of friendliness I should have expected from Algernon!" I exclaimed. "God send them all a safe journey and a speedy arrival!"

And thus, on one thorny point, my mind was most unexpectedly set at rest. My cousin *was* returning to his native country; and returning in the spontaneous execution of one of those duties to which his generous life had been devoted. It was for a member of the Mordaunt family, too, that he was braving difficulty and danger; and in the depths of my heart, I could not help flattering myself that "Lizzy" had some share in securing his good services for Clara and Henry. It is true they, also, were his cousins; but they were not, like myself, the idols of his youth,—for whom he would have resigned all, from whom he had once hoped to derive the glory and happiness of his days.

"Every thing has been against me," said Henry, in a desponding voice, after having recapitulated the difficulties likely to befal these beloved travellers, and the dangers to which he had himself been personally exposed. "On setting foot yesterday in London, where I expected to find my wife and child established in safety, the first person I encountered at the Foreign Office was my old friend Castelcicala, come to announce to Government the dreadful end of poor Sicignano."

"The dreadful end of poor Sicignano!" I repeated, with a look of horror · "My dearest Harry! you must be dreaming. Scarcely five days ago, I parted from the Duke in perfect health!"

"Five days are even as five centuries, in such a case. Last night, I saw him in his coffin! Unaware of the imminence of my father's danger, I could not refuse Castelcicala's request that I would accompany him to the hotel where our unhappy friend put an end to his brief and brilliant existence. I assisted him to place seals upon the poor Duke's effects, and communicate the sad event to the Sicignano family."

"And is no motive assigned?" I faltered, scarcely able to breathe when I reflected upon the incautiousness of my communications to him respecting Lady Helena de Vere.

"None! he transacted business that morning with Lord Grenville, in a composed and able manner. He was in no personal difficulties; for bills for five thousand pounds, on London bankers, were found in his desk. Grenier and the rest of the people at the hotel give the highest praise to his regular and punctual habits, bewailing him, indeed, as if they had lost a friend."

"Did he leave no letter?"

"None that afforded explanation. Since the case of the unfortunate Duke of Rochester, which I do not even yet fully understand, no instance has occurred of a suicide so involved in mystery. Young, handsome, noble, wealthy; happy in his engagement to one of the loveliest and most amiable girls in England"—

"There, I fear, lies the origin of all!" cried I, interrupting him in deep affliction. "The Duchess having peremptorily interdicted their union, has for some time past promoted a match between poor Helena and Lord Mount-Hardington; and in my last interview with the Duke, I unluckily thought it my duty to admit a conviction, that all hope of a conclusion in his favour was at an end."

"Poor Sicignano! you have indeed developed this afflicting mystery," replied Henry, gravely.

"But not, alas! my own unlucky share in accelerating the catastrophe. Twice, my dear Henry,—twice have I been the innocent cause of self-murder!" cried I, in unspeakable distress.

"My dearest Lizzy!"

"But for Fitzirnham's impetuous defence of myself and inculpation of the Duchess, the Duke of Rochester might be yet alive; and on quitting Brighton for Spetchingley four days ago, I was commissioned by my aunt to replace things on their former footing between Helena and Sicignano. Engrossed by the perilous condition of my father, I gave no further thought to them,—and behold the result!"

"Accuse not yourself unjustly. You have acted, my dear sister, as others would have done in your place. A dying father was necessarily your first object; and who could suppose that the sensibility of that gay-hearted young man would be so profoundly touched!"

"This very day, I purposed writing to him!" said I; "and he is already consigned to the grave. What will become of poor Helena! I received a letter yesterday from the poor girl, assuring me of the unaltered state of her affections, and imploring me to bring about a reconciliation between her mother and her lover!"

"Helena is young. We have right to hope that an impression so recently imbibed may be eventually obliterated. My compassion regards rather the mother and sister of Sicignano. He was an only son; the line of an ancient family is broken by his untimely death; and how will his lovely sister Leonora* surmount the loss of the companion

* Extract from the Annual Register:—"Died, at Grenier's hotel, in Jermyn Street, about six o'clock in the evening, the Duke of Sicignano, lately arrived here as Ambassador from Naples. A paper, which was found on the table in the Duke's handwriting, declared, 'that the act was his own free choice; that no one was to be blamed, nor was any one privy to it.' He had said to his secretary, about an hour before, that he should dine at the Imperial Ambassador's; and expressed a wish that whenever he did not immediately answer a knock at the door, no person should repeat the knocking, or endeavour to come in. The secretary had occasion to call upon him in the evening, and receiving no answer to his rap, went away, according to the wish of the Duke. After a second and third unsuccessful attempt, he was alarmed; and the door being locked, was burst open by the servants. The body, when found, was still moving, but, as the surgeons declared, merely by the convulsions of death! The ball had passed through his head, and he died a few minutes afterwards. The motive of this violence against himself cannot be discovered. Bills of credit for £5,000 were found in his escritoire. He was not thirty years of age, of a very favourable appearance, and a disposition

of her childhood? Never was there a man more truly beloved in his family than the poor Duke of Sicignano."

"I have scarcely courage to reflect upon the aggrvated calamities awaiting, day after day, the house of De Vere!" cried I, unable to sympathize as I could wish, in the interest testified by Henry for his Neapolitan friends.—"There is no longer a point to which the Duchess can turn for the gratification of her pride, or the consolation of her feelings."

"Providence is just!" replied my brother, with earnestness. "The end of our good father was crowned with consolation. The Duchess, whose life has been one of unmerited and unimproved prosperity, is turning at length towards the shade."

I considered it my duty to devote the ensuing week, in respect and gratitude to Mrs. Mordaunt; and before I quitted Spetchingley, the measure of the Duchess's misfortunes was accomplished. The newspapers announced in one brief line, the decease of "Henry Duke of Rochester, a minor;" and devoted a column to the enumeration of the high-sounding titles and prodigious property devolving, in consequence of this event, to "Henry Whitehouse De Vere, Esq., of Gartonside, in the county of Westmoreland, who succeeds to the Marquisate of De Vere and all the English honours, the dukedom of Rochester being extinct. "Henry Whitehouse De Vere," said the journals of the day, "now Marquis De Vere, Earl of Penderels, Viscount Colne, Baron Gartonside, Wold, and Wolstenholm, descends in a direct line from John, second son of Lord Francis, third son of Hugh, second Duke of Rochester, who was raised to that dignity by King James I.

evenly, and even powerfully cheerful. As soon as the event became known, Prince Castelcicala and some other foreign noblemen went to Grenier's, to view the body, and took charge of his effects. Next morning, Mr. Burgess, one of his Majesty's Under Secretaries of State, at the request of Lord Grenville, went to the hotel, to make the necessary inquiries concerning the suicide, and to give orders for the removal and interment of the corpse; and an express was sent off to Naples with the melancholy news. The Duke was a young nobleman of one of the best families in Italy, of very amiable manners, and much beloved by those who knew him. A lovely sister is dangerously ill from the melancholy event having been communicated to her in too sudden a manner."

The Marquis was united, on the 3d of May 1748, to Mary, only daughter of John Doblyns Smith, by whom he has had sixteen children, of whom fifteen survive—seven sons and eight daughters; the eldest, now Earl of Penderels, having married, in 1770, Miss Grace Wroughton, of Chingle Park, by whom he has a family of ten children. The Marquis comes into immediate possession of Vere Court, in Lancashire, Castle Wolstenholm, in the county of Monaghan, Beaufort House, in the county of Middlesex, besides estates in the counties of York and Westmoreland, altogether comprehending a rent-roll of between eighty and ninety thousand pounds per annum."

And thus, some forty or fifty obscure individuals received their share in the compensations of Providence; while the guilty woman, so long triumphant, was dismissed to an humble mediocrity. Instead of courts and castles, the small estate of Vere Park, in Berkshire, was to constitute henceforward her sole possession. Plate, diamonds, all the ducal appanage of the wyvern-volant, was to be given up to strangers; and the improvident hands, which had scarcely found ninety thousand a-year sufficient to supply their prodigality, were hereafter to restrict themselves to two augmented by about as many more, until the marriage of her daughters. Henceforth she was to become a cypher in that world of wantonness and vanity, in which for so many years she had been permitted to reign supreme!

Our little party, meanwhile, readily consented to remove with me from Spetchingley, now so fraught with painful reminiscences, to Penderels, whence the communication with London was immediate. My brother proposed to be chiefly in town till Clara's arrival; having law business on his hands connected with the division of family property, as well as with the affairs of the Duke of Sicignano, the arrangement of which he had undertaken, in conjunction with Prince Castelcicala. Mrs. Mordaunt and my worthy cousin became inmates for the first time, under the roof of that once disdainful Lizzy, now so deeply and feelingly conscious of the value of their friendship. The childish sportiveness of little Algernon served to enliven the depression of our spirits; and, as the spring was breaking and Hertfordshire assuming that ornate rural

elegance, for which its trimly parks and graceful plantations are so remarkable, I had the pleasure of feeling that Penderels was in its best array to welcome the travellers.

The period, however, was one of anxious suspense. Every eye, every thought, was constantly directed towards the lodge-gate opening from the London road; and when at last, the long-expected vehicle came in sight, and Clara, Henry, and their eldest boy made their appearance, *unaccompanied*, I had not courage to inquire the cause of Algernon's absence.

My fears were charitably relieved by my brother. Algernon was safe, well, but detained in St. James's Square by the serious illness of his brother. A neglected fall the preceding spring at Melton, had produced some inward injury, and the state of the Earl was considered precarious. It was written, in short, that in this, as in all else, the Duchess of Rochester should reap only mortification in her projects for the establishment of her daughters.

It was, however, as Algernon Rawborne—simply as Algernon—that my dear cousin, during the temporary amendment of his ungracious brother, found his way to Penderels, and took courage for a final explanation. Confessions and professions followed on both sides; ending in a solemn mutual engagement, ratified at the close of a few months by a still dearer, still closer tie. My friend and benefactor became at length my husband.

And when the melancholy attendance of this affectionate brother upon the peevish sick-bed of the Earl, terminated in his accession to wealth and worldly distinction, I had the satisfaction of fulfilling a wish dear to my heart, by installing the unfortunate Duchess and her daughters in the family estate of Penderels, as well as of continuing to soothe by the tenderest affection the sorrows of my ill-fated cousins.

Of my own destinies as a wife, I forbear to speak. Perfect contentment is a condition of such soothing quality, that I might perhaps lull my readers to a more than desirable mood of quietude by a description of the destinies of the Countess of Rawborne. It was, only, alas! as a Countess Dowager that I became once more an actress in those busy scenes which, affording little merit in the practice and little satisfaction in the retrospect, are not without

their use as a topic of comment and animadversion. With Algernon, I dwelt afar off from what was termed by witlings "the host of Faro," and the glittering pleasures of the world. We lived in retirement, surrounded by a few cheerful neighbours, and cheered by frequent visits from eminent men and illustrious politicians, with whom the association of mine and Lord Rawborne's early life had made us familiar. Fox accompanied by Hare and Fitzpatrick, was our frequent guest. Happy in ourselves—in each other—we——but of that period no more! Such reminiscences are too much for my present season of isolation and decrepitude.

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CHAPTER XVII.

At the commencement of my task as a commentator of my "life and times," I designed to treat of the former as comprehended within the happy spring-time of my years; and of the latter, as closing with the close of the last century. For what is the life of a decayed beauty but a cheerless November day, inspiring only gloomy reflections; and how can a woman presume to judge dispassionately of times in which she has ceased to exercise an influence?

How little did I conjecture, when, on witnessing the dawn of a new age, again a widow, and, alas! still childless: I exclaimed in bitterness of heart: "My glory has departed from me—my days are done!" that I should survive through so vast a portion of its onward progress! At five-and-thirty, withered in heart and soul by my double bereavement, I registered a vow to attempt no further realization of my chimeras of domestic happiness. I was rich—a Countess Dowager;—ambition delighted me not, nor splendour either. I had nothing to gain by marriage in re-

turn for the independence I must lose; and to have effaced the united image of those two beloved beings, one of whom had engrossed my love, the other my affection, by any new partiality, would have been little less than sacrilege in my estimation.

In pursuance of these intentions, I remained stationrry for several years after the loss of Lord Rawborne, at an old manor house situated in the same county with Rawborne Hall; which, being entailed with the title, was now in the hands of a distant kinsman. But this could not last. My nieces, all of whom were happily married, and my two sisters, whose children were dear to me as my own, often drew me from my solitude to become their guest; till, from one thing to another, motives of health, motives of convenience, partly choice, partly accident, induced me to provide myself with a house in London, and become, once more, a resident in town.

French women, whose sayings are seldom actuated by delicacy of sentiment, assert that the perfection of female happiness would be to be born a widow. These lax talkers must certainly have in view a widowhood such as mine, —healthy, wealthy, and uncontrolled. I had nothing to do but be happy in my own way when I fixed myself in my comfortable mansion in May-fair; but to preserve that way my own, Love was to be the first name excluded from my visiting list. As a nun is said to espouse the cloister on quitting the world, *I* resolved to espouse the world in quitting my solitude. With no intention, however, of becoming a submissive wife! My temper was now a little domineering; and I resolved to acquire great influence over my new partner. It was something at least, that I could throw myself into its arms without a feeling of bitterness. The wound arising from disappointed affections inflicts a permanent scar upon the character; and, as a peevish fretful bride, I might have failed to obtain the ascendancy I coveted. But my happiness had been as complete as sublunary happiness can be. The blow by which it was twice destroyed, was dealt me from above; I had a right to grieve, but none to rebel. I had no quarrel with society; no wrongs to avenge upon the world.

Philosophy too came to my aid. I discovered that, even when the plant has shed its bloom, the foliage may be worth

preserving. Nature, which provides us with a progressive digestion for every succession of aliment between infancy and old age, provides us also with variable capacities of happiness; and the childhood, which is pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw, becomes, after "a youth of folly, an old age of cards." When young, we despise dowagerly enjoyments; but with dowagerhood, comes the love of scandal, toadies, and lap-dogs; and I gradually found myself enamoured of a blue macaw and an elegiacal preacher. Ten years afterwards, I frequented the Lock Chapel; and took my airings in the Regent's Park, instead of that of Hyde!

These branches of my vocation were, however, gradually embraced. On first settling in London, a few of my friends of former days remained to welcome me:—the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the Melbournes, Robert Spencers, and many others. With St. Anne's Hill, even in my utmost seclusion, I had kept up unceasing intercourse; and it was now more delightful than ever to steal a few days' respite from the tumult of the metropolis, and enjoy with the best of men, the beauties of the sequestered scene to which he was so much attached. Fox was too devoted a husband to admit of any misconstruction of the motives which drew me to his side; and often, when Mrs. Fox saw us return together from the favourite tree, beneath whose shade it was his delight to watch the animated course af the Thames, she discerned in a moment from my reddened eye-lids, that we had been dwelling together upon the past, and cherishing the precious memory of those, who had been dear to *me* and dear to *him*.

One day, soon after the proclamation of the peace or rather truce of Amiens, I was surprised in Stanhope-street by a visit from my illustrious friend, who found me musing over a volume of Madame Cottin's last novels.

"Come, come," cried he, "my dear Lady Rawborne! Lay aside these phantoms of the brain. Study human nature, if you will; but men and women are best in the original. An excellent opportunity affords itself. Mrs. Fox and I are off for the Continent: I am anxious to snatch a moment for the examination of the archives of Paris, for my Stuart history. There are precious documents, per-

haps still recoverable, which were stolen during the revolution, from the Scotch College."

"Do not think to deceive me," said I, laughing, "with such shallow pretexts. You want to inhale in the republican capital, the incense likely to be burnt before the champion of liberty. You care not a jot for your imbecile James and his intrigues."

"Admit, at least, that I care for my nephew Holland, whom I am to meet there. Lord Robert and poor Hare too are to be in Paris in the autumn, and St. John accompanies us. We make our tour through Holland. Come! exert yourself. You will be just the person to plead at the consular court, the fallen cause of aristocracy, with all the eloquence of beauty and high breeding."

"Your flatteries shall not beguile my poor vanity," said I.

"Let me appeal then to another weakness of your sex, and accuse you of apprehending competition with Mesdames Recamier and Tallien!"

"No need of all these arts of policy!" I replied, interrupting him. "The first person you meet in Paris will be your faithful humble servant."

This promise I fulfilled. I was in waiting at the Hotel de Richelieu, when Mr. and Mrs. Fox arrived in the month of August; after receiving in their progress through France, the homage, I might almost say adulation, of all classes of society. For, the worship I had formerly seen offered up in London to my friend, was nothing, compared with that which awaited him on the Continent. The proverb that no man is a prophet in his own country was fully exemplified in Fox. In England he was esteemed as an able statesman; but the public rarely think much of a statesman with whom the state can dispense. In Paris, he was idolized as a demi-god. Military serenades, deputations, civic festivals, had greeted him in the provinces; in the capital, he was followed in the promenades, applauded in the theatres, caressed in society, cheered by the people, flattered by the government. His air, his dress, his very infirmities were imitated; every thing was "à la Fox!" And this is the strongest evidence of Parisian enthusiasm. Were a prophet really to descend among them, their hats

and cutlets would instantly be named "*à la Moïse*," or "*à la Mahomet*."

Charles bore his honours with his accustomed meekness; or rather with the total absence of quackery which distinguished his sterling and truly English character. He pursued, aided by Mr. Adair, his researches in the ably organized Hotel des Archives; or visited the environs; or even suffered Madame Recamier to drag him off for exhibition in some public promenade. "We must be seen together," she used to exclaim. "Before you came, *I* was the lion in fashion; and for worlds I would not have people suppose me jealous of my rival."

My own curiosity, meanwhile, was eagerly excited by the first aspect of a city which, for the last ten years, had so completely engrossed the attention of Europe. How short a time had elapsed since the arrival of every French post brought tidings which caused our very souls to thrill with terror! So powerful indeed, and still so vivid, were the impressions created by the frightful epoch of the revolution, that we fancied the blood could scarcely yet be dried up which had deluged the devoted city. The Abbaye; the Conciergerie; the Temple; the Guillotine, (*the Guillotine!*) were names retaining all their fearful associations for English ears; and a few days after my arrival, I visited the Place de Louis XV. and the Cimetière de la Madeleine, prepared to feel and witness the most profound emotions.

But I little knew Paris; I little knew the French. Already, all was obliterated; all forgotten! A few glorious battles had withdrawn every particle of public interest from the national tragedy; and the only wounds left bleeding in France by the iniquities of the Reign of Terror, were discreetly concealed from view by the embroidered uniforms and tri-coloured scarves, besetting the levees of the First Consul.

With respect to the *coup d'œil* of Republican institutions promised me by Fox, if levity had effaced the terrible trophies of the Revolution, courtiership was already beginning to re-regalize the desecrated palace of the Bourbons. Amid the Brutus heads, and Agrippina tunics of the new court, the leaven of chamberlainship and ladyship of the bedchamber was rapidly rising. Already an *effort* was perceptible, in any adherance to the studied simplicity of the Consular circle.

There were hosts of English in Paris; the Duchess of Gordon lifting up her hands and eyes with horror, at every thing she beheld; and the French lifting up theirs in admiration of her vulgarity. Lady Elizabeth Foster, and Lord and Lady Cholmondeley were also there; the Hollands, the Conynghams, the Cahers, and lesser stars innumerable. We formed a tolerable *corps d'élite* of the fine and fanciful; and whereas every little congregation of fashion must have its idolatry and its infidelity, our *clique* soon divided itself into Bonapartists and Anti-Bonapartists. I could not exactly discover what part the latter faction (among whom were a few furious Bourbonists) came to play just then in Paris. Perhaps to seek the excitement of disgust, in preference to the lassitude of ennui; just as others were idly enthusiastic in favour of the toga united with top-boots; or of Athenian tunics, bare arms, wet drapery, and Madame Recamier.

I resolved, (as one usually resolves when conscious of a secret leaning,) to judge all things and all people with rigid impartiality. The heroic campaigns of Italy, as compared with our own recent pigtail-and-pipe-clay soldiership in Holland, had kindled some little enthusiasm in my mind in favour of the young Cæsar, whose three-cornered hat was soon to be as well-recognised an emblem of glory as the laurel crown of many an ancient victor; and having particular letters of introduction to Madame Bonaparte, from persons who, having adored her as the wife of a legitimate Viscount, detested her as the Calphurnia of the First Consul, my application for an audience was promptly accorded.

Some saints are elevated to martyrdom by their virtues, and some by their opportunities. Josephine is one of those to whom public infatuation has opened a niche in the Kalendar for more than her own deserts. I saw her near and familiarly; my whole life has been spent among the vain and artificial; and among the vainest and *most* artificial, was the Ex-empress. Neither *artificial* nor *artful*, however, convey the exact sense of the word *artificieuse*, which I wish to express. Her *bonté*, so much lauded, was a grimace,—her elegance, of the most frivolous and superficial nature; her charities consisted in a profuse distribution of the pocket-pickings of the nation; and so far from being just, either before or after she was generous, honesty

was a virtue so foreign to her system, as frequently to expose her to the rebukes of her more equitable husband. Josephine was, in short, the very personification of the old Faubourg St. Germain,—ignorant, dissolute, fickle, vain, unprincipled; but a proficient in that art of pleasing, which consists in over-mastering two of the most pitiful instincts of human nature,—vanity and self-interest. She gave largely, she flattered profusely; and the world, instead of admiring the forbearance of Napoleon in supporting her so long as his partner, reviled him as an ingrate when at length he put her away. All the wives in Europe took part with the suffering wife, who fainted so despairingly at the prospect of losing the Imperial crown; overlooking the culpable levities, by the report of which in Egypt, the young general was nearly deprived of his reason, and by the sight of which, in Italy, he was again almost driven to distraction. It is a lesson to those who overlook the advantages of amiability, that even to this day, the *prestige* created by the charm of Josephine's graciousness survives. The French still adduce Napoleon's desertion of her as the first signal of his decadence, without perceiving that the same epoch sealed the Emperor's ruinous connexion with the house of Austria; and stoop to lament over the untimely death of one, whom the memoirs of her little court at Navarre describe, as receiving with peals of laughter, the news of the dimensions of the Duchess of Angoulême's bonnet, and the awkwardness of Louis *douze neuf's* gout, at the moment the Allies were setting their triumphant foot on the neck of Napoleon and the pride of France!

At the period of my visit to Paris, however, Josephine was known rather by her fashionable gallantries as Madame Beauharnais, than by her graces as Madame Bonaparte. There could not be a plainer proof that the circle of the Tuilleries was gradually forming itself into courtiership, than that the *minauderies* and infirmities of a woman, who, in attempting to conceal the blemishes of her front teeth, had acquired a false and habitual smile, were beginning to find imitators. When the wife of the First Consul appeared in public, ornamented with a splendid cameo borrowed from the National Museum, the belles of Paris began to ruin themselves with the purchase of antique gems; and after a tunic of filmy Indian muslin had been

assumed by Josephine, in imitation of her now discarded friend Madame Tallien Cabarus, not all the Consular decrees could restrict them to the produce of the looms of Lyons. No person who watched the servile copies of Madame Bonaparte's dress and manners, presented not only by the wives of the generals and public functionaries of the Republic, but by returned emigrants and ci-devant royalists, but must have perceived that a throne was gradually rising up under the Consular government, as a scaffold had risen unnoticed during the reckless ascendancy of royalty.

The emotion betrayed by the First Consul in his first interview with Fox, is now as well and historically known, as his ignorance of the very name of Lord Erskine; and the precedency assigned to the family of Charles James Fox over the Duchess of Gordon and her daughter, prejudiced in favour of General Bonaparte. Yet I returned from my first *soiree* at the Tuilleries, sharing the general enthusiasm for the graciousness of Josephine and her daughter, and revolted by the abrupt manners of the Premier Consul. In the Beauharnas portion of the circle, I observed the congenial amenity of the ancient French court; in Bonaparte and his sisters, the upstart underbreeding of the family of the Corsican attorney. But after repeated returns and frequent interviews, I grew ashamed of having noted only the ill-dressed, ill-mannered, ill-at-ease tyro in state ceremonial, in that far-sighted, wide-thoughted man, under whose auspices the regeneration of a half-ruined kingdom was taking effect; the legislator whose victories would have sufficed to make him famous; the general who might have been immortalized by the sagacity of his legislation; and above all the enthroned man of genius, who still presumed to live in brotherhood with artists and men of letters. The progress of art and science, the growth of useful institutions, already attested the prosperity of the Commonwealth; and, after returning from a tour of the newly restored gallery of the Louvre, with Denon and Millin; and a day spent under the escort of young Charles de Flahault among the military trophies of the recent campaign, I was ready to forgive the rash glances cast by the Consul that evening upon the bevy of English travellers aspiring to the hospitalities of the Tuilleries.

One quality, among the many I recognised in Bonaparte, has been consistently denied him by his enemies, and not sufficiently vindicated by his friends; I mean *the goodness of his heart*. A political murder forced upon his concurrence by a master-spirit of evil, still too ascendant to be impugned without hazard, has affixed so vile a stigma on his character in the eyes of the English and anti-revolutionary French, that it has been made an article of religion to anathematize the natural enemy of our country, under the name of the assassin of the Duc d'Enghien. Setting apart, however, political animosities, and the evil inspirations of the crookedest of modern politicians, I have no hesitation in asserting the worthiness of Napoleon's disposition. A good son to an imperious mother; a good brother to men who endangered his sceptre by their intrigues, and sisters who dishonoured him by gallantry and prodigality; an indulgent husband to a profuse and faithless wife, an uxorious one to the mother of the child he adored; Napoleon was indulgent with his step-children, equitable with his household, affectionate almost to weakness, with his brothers in arms. *His* goodness was twice as genuine as that of Josephine. Sagacious as he was, *his* goodness often rendered him a dupe. It would be as unjust to pronounce Nelson a hard-hearted man, from his having permitted the execution of Caraccioli, as to write down Bonaparte a monster, for having been misled into sanctioning that of the Duc d'Enghien.

Be it observed, however, that this my defence is purely gratuitous, and recorded for conscience sake; for not only was I personally undistinguished by the General's good graces, but one of the least agreeable proofs of his candour consisted in the irrepressible manifestation of his antipathies towards the English. The longer I live, the more I become convinced that this detestation is as mutual as it is uneradicable and instinctive; overcome only by accidental motives, and predominating even in minds of superior faculty and enlightenment; a hatred that has lasted eight hundred years, and will last as many more. The First Consul could do homage to incontestable genius in the person of Fox; just as, when Emperor, he paid homage to the merit of Jenner and other scientific men. But he made no secret of his disgust at the coarseness of the

Duchess of Gordon, or the *beauishness* of our men of condition; nor was he at any pains to modify the eventual outbreak of his rage against our pompous representative, Lord Whitworth.

This dislike it must be owned, was industriously fanned into a flame by the belles of the Consular court. The youthful beauty of lady Conyngham, the charms of Lady Georgiana Gordon, Miss Seymour, Miss Wilmot, and innumerable other handsome Englishwomen bearing away the palm at all the balls of the Carnival, drove to despair the underbred pretensions of the pretty *parvenues*, who imitated the fine ladyism of poor Madam Bonaparte as abominably as the waiting maids "below-stairs," in the English farce of "High Life," counterfiet their titled mistresses. Many of them were eminently handsome; but it afforded endless amusement to such of ourselves as were accustomed to the quiet manners of the circles of the Prince and of Devonshire house, to see the parade and display, the laborious elegance, the fussy magnificence, of the wives of Junot, Talleyrand, Cabarus, Murat, Savary, and others. The former, more especially was not without pretensions to the favour of the First Consul, who delighted in playing off her affectation of illustrious descent; for, on the Comnena chapter, Madame Junot was as charming as the inimitable *Précieuses Ridicules* of Molière. Madame de Souza, who maintained in every distinguished circle of foreigners, English, Russian, or Polish, the favour due to superiority of mind and manners, often strove to moderate our mirth, when we amused ourselves with fooling to the top of their bent these Permons, Andréossys, Arrigos, and other Corsican adventurers. Count Cobenzel, Prince Gallitzin, D'Azara, Gallo, the Zamoyskis, the Dolgoruskis, the Dutchess of Courland and her daughters, formed with the English, a sort of caste apart; to which the fortunate survivors of the noble Faubourg had recourse for sympathy under their mortification at beholding the palace of the Bourbons usurped by the *bourgeois gentilhommes*, and citizen-generals (soon to be ennobled,) of the new order of things. I confess I was incredulous when Fox laughingly asserted, that these newly planted scions were the germs of a future aristocracy; projected by one who already sovereignized in heart, to replace the an-

cient forests cut down or uprooted by the ruthless agency of Robespierre.

"Ten years hence," said one of the shrewdest of our English lordlings, to the Luynes, Chevreuses, Noailles, and Rohans, who still receded from democratic contact, "I promise you as thriving a batch of Dukes, Duchesses, and Chamberlains manufactured out of what you so cavalierly designate *canaille*, as you would wish to see. You are all courtiers at heart, yes *all:* and verily your molten calf shall be set up again, according to the vain-glorious desires of your hearts; pending which, let us go and see the renovated Raphael of Foligno! *Vivent les beaux arts!* Denon (lucky dog) assures me the Venus de Medicis is soon to be in his keeping,"

"And can this," said I, gazing on the splendid restorations of the Carousel, as I proceeded with the Foxes to a fête given them by Madame Recamier, at her villa at Clichy, "*can* this be the Paris of Mirabeau and Robespierre! Scarcely ten years ago, one expected the city would become buried in human bones, like Pompeii under its ashes, and look how resplendently it shines forth!"

"Let the dead bury their dead!" replied my friend, gravely. "Would you have the French government leave incomplete the fine line of Boulevarts we have been traversing, because the Cimetière de la Madeleine lies at one extremity, and the ruins of the Bastille at the other?"

"I have nothing to say against its legislation," cried I; "I admire the alacrity which pushes forward its public works and foreign conquests, and reverence the feeling which has restored its altars—"

"*That* was inevitable; since even its archpriest of infidelity admitted that '*Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer!*'"

"But I can *not* comprehend that with the Abbaye still standing, and the guillotine at all hours ready for re-erection, the ambition of these people should take the shape of crowns and coronets!"

"I give them five years to make their consul a king; nay, who knows? (for they have lost time to make up in courtiership,) perhaps an emperor; like the sculptor in the fable, who carved a Jupiter out of a block, then kneeling down adored it as a divinity."

"*You* are of opinion, however, that a divine spark pre-existed in the marble?"

"Undoubtedly; the marble is only of too fine a grain for the thing into which they will degrade it. If ever there breathed a man calculated to form the code of a despotic monarch it is Talleyrand. From *him*, no toleration, no liberty of the press, no sovereignty of the people, unless when forced upon him by lapidation or the point of the bayonet. Talleyrand sprang to life in the midst of a storm, and became a reed. Should his power avail to create a calm, it will be only to become hard and unwedgable as the oak."

"Were I obliged to describe the human chameleon of whom you are talking," cried I, "as Homer qualifies his hero, 'the god-like man,' I should define the ex-bishop, 'the fiend-like.'"

"Fie upon your want of charity!" cried my illustrious companion. "Has not the Pope just issued a brief to thank him for having condescended to become reconciled to the Church?"

"Which the Counsel of State has registered," replied I, laughing, "(according to the public explanation of poor blundering Cambacérès,) in order that at his death there may be no squabble with the clergy about his interment! Citizen Charles Maurice is afraid that the Vicar of Saint Roch may raise the same objections against consecrating *his* ashes, as against those of Mademoiselle Chameroy, the opera-dancer (both fine performers in their way,) in retribution of the scandalous tenor of her life."

"Unless I am much mistaken," observed Lord S——, who was of the party, "there will be no immediate appeal to their offices. Talleyrand looks as if he could live half a century longer, by the mere force of his own will."

I had soon an opportunity of inspecting the life and manners of this pseudo-centenarian. Fox had repeatedly dined at Neuilly, the beautiful country seat of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, two miles from the gates of Paris; and having been myself presented to Madame Talleyrand by an Anglo-East-Indian beauty, who had known her as Mrs. Grant in the East, long before she became celebrated at Paris as '*la belle et bête*,' I was invited to one of their brilliant evening parties. Nothing could be more enchant-

ing than those beautiful gardens, sloping to the Seine; crowded as they were with some of the most remarkable personages in Europe. The *corpse diplomatique* of its divided kingdoms was there from necessity; the English, from curiosity; the Parisian world, from policy; and the world of genius, from choice. Great names were announced in the saloons of Talleyrand! Fox and Erskine, as the representatives of British eminence; Bougainville, the veteran traveller; Volney, the author of one of the most eloquent books in the French language; the Abbate Casti, author of that bitter satire, the *Animali Parlanti*, ably translated by Stuart Rose; and the Abbé Sièyes, the constitution monger of the States-General. Rœderer, too, was there; Lucchesini, Cobenzel, Markoff; Livingston, the plenipo. of a real to the sham republic; Moreau, Bruix, Suchet, Massena, and several of the heroes of Italy. In a corner of one of the saloons I observed John Kemble, solemn as a church, in colloquy with the brilliant, animated Talma; and in another, Eugène Beauharnais, sunning his young heart in the smiles of the Recamier.

Such a scene was at once exciting and amusing. When Madame Talleyrand entered the saloon, she was preceded by two oriental looking damsels, robed in muslin; who burned before her divinityship cassolettes of precious incense, intended, I suppose, to represent the sacred fire of Vesta; while the Citizen Charles Maurice, the adored of princesses and finisher of the law to princes, stood, like the Delhi Lama, immutable and unsearchable, accepting the fumes of that far more subtle incense, which emanates from the lowest of men as the only tribute worthy of the highest,—FLATTERY! Talleyrand received an income of ten thousand a year ("Glory to your cheap-and-nasty half-price republican institutions!" said an English Duchess, on hearing the amount,) to do the honours of the capital. But though compelled by the complexion of the times to receive indiscriminately the celebrities of his own country, nothing could be plainer than that the ex-bishop regarded every man of letters as abhorrently as Cæsar, Cassius;—that he loathed their lean and hungry look, and denounced such men "dangerous!"

Far different was the sentiment conveyed in his humble obeisance to the young Prince of Saxe-Weimar, who was

there for his farewell audience. Never was there born a more intense aristocrat than Talleyrand! His efforts to forward the Revolution were such as the condemned prisoner in a solitary cell might use to set fire to the dungeon in which he is doomed to wither; but having once effected his escape and thrown behind him his stole and mitre, he cared not how soon another Bastille was constructed for the resubjugation of his countrymen. It was but to feel the pulse of the people towards royalty, that he suggested to Bonaparte to invite to Paris the king and queen of Etruria; when the applause bestowed at the theatre on the celebrated line in Philoctete (a representation of which was given in honour of the First Consul and his royal guest),

"J'ai fait des souverains, et n'ai pas voulu l'être,"

augured ill for his projects for the regalization of France.

Still, the ridiculous nature of the experimental puppets he had brought forward, induced him to hope that a "*soldat heureux*" might be more successful than a *roi mannequin*, deriving his honours from ancestors scarcely more gifted than himself. Aware how much the popularity of the *Concordat* had been secured by the ecclesiastical splendours of the Cardinals Gonsalvi and Caprara, he trusted that a little more display of purple and fine linen, tinsel and buckram, might propitiate the sovereign people towards a sovereign throne. Though Don Louis was a *singe couronne*, he trusted to behold an Imperial eagle fledged under his fosterage, to preside over the regenerated destinies of an Empire.

Meanwhile, in spite of all the efforts of the fair and gay, the cajolements of the Recamier, and the persecutions of David and other artists, (who coolly requested Fox to desophisticate himself to a state even more natural than that of "poor Tom," that they might model his person for a statue,) my illustrious friend devoted his mornings to the Hotel des Archives, studying and taking notes. It was in vain I strove to divert his attention from the musty records of an obsolete dynasty, to the curious extravagances of human nature passing around us; such as the romantic passions of the *grandes dames* of our society for ex-bishops,

archbishops, and even cardinals,—the overstrained enthusiasm affected by others for the oracular tone of the Premier Consul,—and the jealousy with which their mines were counterminded by the courtieresses of Josephine.

Before winter set in, Parliament and fox-hunting thinned the ranks of the English, to the gratification of the Anglophobia of Napoleon. The Fox party was among the first to depart; and, with few exceptions, those that remained belonged to the commercial class; so that when at length the precipitate declaration of hostilities, and the sudden departure of Lord Whitworth, placed eleven thousand of my loving country-people at the mercy of Bonaparte's, or rather Talleyrand's bad faith, the French were disappointed, on hauling up the net, to perceive that their prey consisted of what La Fontaine calls the "*menu fretin!*" The larger fishes had broken through in haste, and swam across the Channel; and when I found myself once more safe in Stanhope Street and learned that the Yarmouths and a few others were *netted*, I could scarcely be grateful enough for the anxious letters from St. Anne's Hill, which, forewarning me of my danger, had opportunely recalled my steps to my native country.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Pitt-star was now raging again. "Havock!" was once more the cry. The fires smouldering in their embers fanned into redoubled fury by a diplomatic breeze; and "The dogs of war" "let slip."

It was a curious crisis!—The national excitement, which in these latter days I have seen stirred up by measures of

constitutional policy, was then engrossed by the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war. The gathering cry of "invasion" once raised, was repeated from tongue to tongue; "*la raison avec son petit filet de voix*" became inaudible. Talleyrand, the ablest guesser in Europe, had so admirably conjectured the character of the English, as to know that their attention would be absorbed by the novelty of clanking arms, "and busy hammers closing rivets up," as a swarm of bees is facinated by the sonorous music of a warming-pan; and while we scuffled away to build our martello towers, sink our military canals, and present colours to our loyal volunteers, the ex-bishop and ex-lieutenant of artillery perfected, unmolested, their plans of continental subjection.

The English are not essentially a military nation. The insulated position which so auspiciously secures us from wanton attack, relieves us also from the instinct engendered by centuries of self-defence. The Poles were said aforetime to be born on horseback. The Hungarians, incessantly harassed by their barbarian neighbours, assumed for daily use a national costume, such as admitted of vaulting at any time in the saddle, ready and willing for a skirmish. But the English, strong in self-security, have glued themselves to their beams, treddles, and cutlers' wheels; unagitated by the swash-buckler valour which picks a quarrel with its neighbour, in hopes that in the course of it, something may turn up worth fighting for. They have no ardour for gratuitous quarrels; they do not fire up like a turkey-cock or a Frenchman, at sight of a red rag. The cause must be a good one that draws them from their fire-sides; but once astir, they return not till justice has been done and the sword can be replaced with honour to the scabbard.

With the exception of the Eastern and Egyptian campaigns, to the heroism of which the populace was never very keenly alive, more than half a century had elapsed since a land victory accredited our soldiership. We seemed to have adopted an opinion, that national quarrels are best decided by those grand national duels called naval engagements. The sea was just then John Bull's favourite field of battle; where the trace of carnage is sooner effaced, the honour obtained more positive. It became

necessary, however, to inspire the nation with enlarged views of heroism. In order to wake the hundred-handed Briareus from his slumber, it was indispensable for Government to make believe, to believe in the make-believe demonstrations of Monsieur Talleyrand!—

"The country is threatened with invasion!" cried the ministers.—"Nonsense!" replied the country.—"Oh! monstrous unbelief!" replied Pitt and Lord Hawkesbury. "If you won't take upon our showing the Spanish fleet you cannot see, because 'tis not in sight, if you have no faith in the flotilla of flat-bottomed boats in Boulogne Harbour, believe, at least, in our own martello towers, our volunteer consolidation bill, our additional force bill; or the First Consul and his troops will be at Canterbury before you have furnished your canteens with milk and water. Nay,—for his soldiers, like those of Lear, are shod with felt, it would not surprise us to find them encamped on Shooter's Hill, while you are frivolously perplexing us with your insurrections in Ireland and your anti-slavery petitions. Cheapside is in danger; Cornhill is shaking on its basis. Look to the Bank, John! look at home."

John laughed.—He was reminded that Hanover was gone. "Joy go with it!" was his reply. "You have secured the state stud and silver tables and chairs of Herrenhausen: as to the rest, what is it but the defalcation of a stupid lubberly school-boy, whose pocket-money came out of our purse, and who did us no earthly credit." John Bull refused, in short, to be frightened out of his wits.

An appeal was next made to his generosity; and this tender point in his heart was readily touched by a representation of the cruel position of the English *detenus* in France; "their unfortunate countrymen languishing in the power of monsters who poisoned their sick at Jaffa, and were perpetrating barbarities without name on the blacks of St. Domingo." John Bull laughed no longer: he would not have his fellow-countrymen treated like niggers or poisoned like frog-eating Frenchmen; he *would* sing God save the King, and become a loyal volunteer! The spirit thus roused, it was easy to maintain. Dibdin was salaried to write patriotic songs,—Astley's to put forth national melo-dramas;—every sign of every ale-house assumed a

military attitude. Recent annals could furnish little in the way of sign-posts. Rodney or Nelson, Howe or Hood, were nothing just then to the purpose; and for want of a newer Cæsar, the bald pate of the Marquis of Granby or the three-cornered hat of the Duke of Cumberland, were revarnished to preside over the potations of an undaunted militia. Volumes might have been perpetuated out of the harangues made by the new colonels to their new corps. Wormwood Scrubs were scarcely wide enough for the marchings and counter-marchings of the Bloomsbury with their yellow facings, and the St. James's with their blue; and Hyde Park was worn grass-bare by the caracolings of the Light Horse. Even Lord's cricket-ground seemed ambitious of substituting cannon for cricket balls; so often were the legions of Mary-le-bone gathered within its palings, to receive colours and give pop-gun note of preparation.

The cause was consecrated by the enthusiasm of royality itself. The Duke of Clarence enrolled himself in the Teddington volunteers, on whom the Prince of Wales bestowed their Spital-field banners of glory; while the Prince, debarred by the twaddling interference of Mr. Addington from the high military command of which he was ambitious, and which he was fully qualified to assume, repaired one fine summer day to Brighton to the head of his regiment of Hussars, in defiance of the assurance of His Majesty's Ministers that it would be far safer for him to remain in Pall Mall.

The spark thus blown into a flame, patriotism became your only wear! The volunteers were the fashion. The populace, in hourly expectation of seeing Bonaparte overcome them like a summer cloud, suspended over the metropolis on a fiery dragon, thought, like the Chinese, to drive away the evil spirit by a perpetual drumming of drums. The Seven Dials were ready to fight like lions for what Dibdin called the tight little island; while the second gallery of the Circus nightly chorussed the comic song of Mr. Herring, "A rope's end for grim Bonyparty." An acorn, in short, was rapidly germinating, which grew and grew, till all the nations of Europe took refuge under shelter of the oak.

The spirit illegitimately evoked soon found legitimate

objects for its fervour; and the invasion-panic, which diverted the eyes of England from the ambitious prospects of the new Emperor on Prussia and Austria, fortunately served to consolidate the forces which eventually found a mighty leader in Wellington, and a new Agin-court at Waterloo.

But all this was in embryo. We were still divided between our indignation at the notion of the tri-coloured flag planted on Rochester Bridge, and our appetite for peace; and it has since sometimes occurred to me, when waging the polite war of whist with his excellency Prince Talleyrand, in some dowager coterie, how often his inward man must have laughed, (for his outward, Heaven knows, is little subject to cachinnation!) when contemplating of late years the gigantic force of England and its metropolis; and remembering that his camp and flotilla had power to agitate the nerves of the great man-mountain, who had only to burst his Lilliputian bondage and overset them by the neighing of his war-horse!

My own tendencies were, I own, strictly pacific. In my illustrious friend, I revered the most genuine of philanthropists—nay, why not lover of his fellow creatures (for, as De Ligne says, what need of a heathen word to express the first of Christian precepts?) *His* sentence was for peace; and any sentence proceeding out of the depths of a heart so warm with the finer instincts of humanity, tempered by faculties so powerful, sustained by public principles so immutable,—gave the law to my feeble mind.

Our summer, meanwhile, was certainly enlivened by the epidemic heroism which dotted every heath with tents, and set up barracks like mile-stones. Bagshot, Hounslow, Coxheath, Warley, and other arid regions prolific of late years only of footpads, and in former of highwaymen, had each its general of brigade. Parades shouldered their arms in every market-place; and as much pipe-clay was sold in England within twelve months of the declaration of hostilities, as had served the vast armies of the Holy Roman Empire during the Thirty years' war!

Undismayed by the drums and fifes of Bagshot, I now took a small place at Sunning Hill, to be within reach of St. Anne's and Fitzpatrick, and at no great distance from town. The health of my own and Fitzirsham's

friend was already impaired. Hare, the companion of our sojourn in Paris, the favourite of all the world, the pleasantest and most cheerful of companions, was no more. The Bishop of Down, too, was gone; and I felt that a mightier loss was to follow. The next few years must necessarily weigh like a century on the head of Fox. Either he would be called to office, and expire under the press of public business; or, in the misfortunes of the country under a ruinous administration, find a more ignominious deathblow! Already we were at *le commencement de la fin!*

All seemed going amiss. Independent of the critical position of public affairs, the aspect of the Royal Family was anything but cheering. The health of the King, alarmingly shaken by domestic afflictions of the most painful kind, as well as by the troubles of Ireland and the menacing attitude of the continent, had again been made a matter of national intercession with the great Disposer of events. The Prince of Wales, estranged from public life and the society of his political associates, had resumed a connexion with one, whom I too deeply venerate to express any opinion concerning its renewal; while the Princess of Wales, unalarmed by an attempt to deprive her of the care of her child (against which she was warmly protected by the kind-hearted King), was indulging in her public privacy at Charlton, in coarse and unbecoming levities. By all this, the tenour of the court was broken up, and St. James's divided against itself. The very frame of society seemed unhinged and out of joint. The charming Duchess of Devonshire, so long the empress of the realms of fashion, was becoming a martyr to ill health; the Duchess of Gordon, having married the last of her daughters, retired from the field; my unfortunate relative was already as if numbered with the dead; and no new potentates appeared worthy or even ambitious of succeeding to their divided sway. The Duchess of St. Albans and her sisters were the most prominent personages; and the Priory attracted the gay world to its balls and theatricals. But there was a break in London society. A want of *ensemble* was perceptible. A flashy tone of barouche-driving and disreputable gallantry, a remote echo of the earlier libertinism of the Prince, discredited the secondary classes of the fashionable world; those classes which, by

their passion for *eclat* and glaring frivolity, are always most prominent in the eyes of the vulgar.

On the whole, if I dare own it, I longed to be back in France. I have seen Paris since that peace of Amiens visit; but never half so brilliant or amusing. The French seemed to feel that it was only by a prodigious effort they could restore the homogeneity of society, which had been so fearfully broken; and bent on making up to themselves for their dozen years of care and humiliation. There was hope,—there was promise before them. A new era was dawning for the arts. They were at once rich in artists, and ripe for their encouragement. Nothing could exceed the brilliancy of their grand opera, or the perfection of the Theatre Francais. Every thing was reviving. The *parvenus*, and above all, the *parvenues* of the Tuileries and Malmaison, brought an atonement-offering in the studious refinement of their tastes and the splendour of their households. Josephine herself, in the midst of her finicalities, did much for the revival of taste. Not only the milliners and jewellers of whom she was so wantonly profuse a patroness, not only upholsterers and decorators, flourished under her favour; but the establishment of Madame Campan began to inculcate strictness of etiquette, if not of principle, upon the beauties of the growing Court; musicians and painters were liberally distinguished; and from the beautiful gardens of Malmaison to the manufactures of Sèvres and the Gobelins, the decorative arts were vivified by a reaction. Much of this fosterage indeed was affectation; for in assuming the tunic of Aspasia, these Duchesses and Princesses in embryo thought it necessary to assume a correspondent classicality of taste. But the effect was better than the cause; and by dint of strong perseverance and keeping a steady aim in view, more than one titled adventuress might in the sequel have done honour to the Trianon of legitimate times.

I had found, in short, in Paris the charm with which the experience of centuries admits it to be invested,—of being the only spot of earth where peace of mind may be dispensed with; "*le lieu du monde ou l'on peut le mieux se passer de bonheur;*"—the most irresponsible,—the least self-denying. The climate, the aspect of the place and people, tend to maintain a singular elasticity of spirits. In

Paris, if I may so Irishly express it, the environs are nearer to town. After a ten minutes' drive, you reach the country, and shake off the artificiality of coteries and courts. From the Bois de Boulogne to the opera, is but a step; while in the very heart of the city, the public gardens are bright with flowers, instead of wooden statues daubed over with gold-leaf, as in our sooty squares. What stronger proof, in short, that something peculiarly exhilarating exists in the atmosphere or the soil, since so few years sufficed to restore to the green groves of the Tuilleries all their gaiety and popularity; obliterating every trace of the tragedy by which the spot had seemed condemned to ages of desecration?

Never did I find London so vapid as on the season succeeding my return. There was such a want of energy in every body, such a want of expansion in every thing, such a terror of innovation;—such a dread that, if the pigtails of the Horse Guards, were abridged or the hoops of the Court ladies abolished, the world might move too fast, and perform its gyration within the twenty-four hours. What is now termed Conservatism, was then first formed into a creed; and unluckily, wit enlisted itself on the stand-still side. Canning and the Anti-Jacobin were doing for politics what the Quarterly Review soon afterwards effected for literature. The grand charm of the State Prospero was the creation of a circle in which every one was reduced to catalepsy. Even irregularity was obliged to *look* regular; and Pitt drank his bottle or bottles of port *per diem*, as soberly as a judge.

"You do not perceive," Fox used to say to me, after smiling ironically at my murmurs against the routine of English society, "that, living in a land of machinery,—of wheels and cylinders, levers and pulleys, we have gradually assimilated ourselves to these sources of national prosperity. At all events, console yourself, dear Lady Rawborne, by the certainty that English nature has need of such restraints. Never was there a greater error of judgment than that which first proclaimed us a phlegmatic nation. Were *we* to indulge in the aberrations of the French, earth would not bound our monstrous irregularities. We put too much heart in all we say and do. *We* are in earnest. *Our*

susceptibility is not skin-deep. I never desire to see an Englishman break out of bounds."

The truth of these remarks did not render them more palatable. A few days afterwards, they received sad confirmation in the death of Lord Camelford. The same intemperance which brought both him and Colonel Montgomery to an untimely grave, would have ended in a fencing bout at Paris. Fox was right; an Englishman will not bear to be emancipated from the influence of routine, or the pondrous machinery (moral code playing into moral code,) with which he has laboured to increase the restrictive power of his own centre of gravity.

It is time I should recur to my own family; a subject which presents itself under too painful an aspect to be acceptable; for when I became a widow, I had outlived both my younger sisters, and Lord Ailesfort was even estranged by a second marriage. Sir Henry Mordaunt, absorbed in his parliamentary duties, occupied during Mr. Addington's administration a post of some eminence. But the gradual alienation so apt in England to creep into families, tended in the course of years to chill all warmth of intercourse between Algernon and my brother. We entertained adverse political principles at a period of great political excitement; we moved in different societies; and our intimacy at length degenerated into a few dinner-parties in town, and a careless week or two spent together at Spetchingley or Rawborne Hall in the course of the year.

Of Penderels, ill-fated Penderels, I would fain refrain from mention. After the death of Helena, which took place a few weeks after my second marriage, the Duchess re-appeared no more in society. Lady Isabella was fortunately removed to a happier home, by an appointment as lady of the bed-chamber to one of the Princesses, whom she has never quitted; and it was under my protection that Adeline and Susan formed those auspicious alliances, which still enable them to shine an ornament to society. The youngest girl remained with her mother to the last; surviving only by a year or two that unfortunate woman, whose atonements on earth sanction an humble hope that she has obtained pardon in a happier sphere. Over her last years; her repentant but fearful death-bed; it becomes a surviving relative to draw a charitable veil!

I would fain recur to recollections of more general and public interest.

My dowager coterie in Stanhope-street has often been stigmatized as an ark-like miscellany. But I occupied too elevated a place in society to cringe to its tyranny; and denunciations of "*mauvais ton*"—"bad set,"—or "shocking company," had no terrors for my ear. Whom I liked, I liked,—whom I chose to see, I saw; for "whom I love," to borrow the words of Coleridge, "I love indeed!"

Associating with the most eminent men of the times, I cultivated, whenever it suited me, the acquaintance of eccentric authors, obscure artists, or intelligent actors, without the fear of the fashion-master before my eyes. I gave up going to court; Carlton House was not yet re-opened to female society; all I had to consult in the choice of my own coterie, was my own satisfaction.

Melancholy retrospections! Fain would I consecrate a page or two of these Memoirs to a few of the great names, whose frequent announcement served to brighten my solitude. But they bring back voices from the dead, or shadows of the past! A few indeed survive otherwise than in the chronicle of Fame. Sidney Smith, Brougham, Jeffrey; Jekyll, the Nestor Rogers, the Undying One; the Misses Berry, Lady Cork, Mrs. Opie; Moore, then a promising young poet, who has since exceeded in fulfilment; and Miss Owenson, a young Irish novelist of eventful genius. But there are others whom I cannot call to mind, without a pang; Romilly, Whitbread, Windham, Curran, Grattan, Matt. Lewis, William Spencer; Tom Sheridan, that most buoyant and fascinating of human beings; Frank Lord Guilford; Mrs. Inchbald, whom I sometimes beguiled from her penurious solitude, and Mrs. Weddell, from her golden one; Mrs. Siddons, Kemble, Lawrence,—with fifty other talented and charming persons of less renown but scarcely inferior merit, arise like shadows to my remembrance!

After the fashion of foreign countries, I attempted to give weekly parties. But the thing was a failure. I soon found the interest flag. The English are not of a conversational temperament; except on the chapter of Politics, we cannot turn our minds inside out for the amusement of the first comer. In discourse with an Englishman, it is easy to read in his countenance that he has an unexpressed *arriere*

pensée,—usually his best. He keeps it for his bosom friend, his wife, his mistress, or himself,—but seldom bestows it on society.

I was consequently obliged to invent entertainments, in order to give a fillip to the dulness of my house; and have recourse to the various meteors occassionally glancing through the world, to prevent my geniuses from falling asleep and my drones from being too wide awake. This obtained me the name of a lion-feeder; a stigma as sure to keep all reasonable beings from one's door, as the red cross of the plague affixed upon its lintel.

No one can guess, who has not attempted it, how laborious the effort by which all idle English people are amused! I have sometimes doubted whether the evil spirit was ever wholly exercised with which it was possessed by Cromwell. A considerable class still makes mirth a crime; and after having admired at Paris the extreme simplicity of character apparent in most of their eminent men, in England exemplified in Fox alone, I had no patience with the formal pedantry of those whom I collected together for the purpose of enjoying themselves, and diffusing enjoyment. A literary circle assembled in London, is sure to degenerate into blueism; while the French literati (schooled by the scarecrow set up by Moliere, to maintain its prohibitory influence for centuries) are as natural and easy as a glove.

Those who really pleased me, and whom I wished to please, would not so much as enter my drawing-room, on the nights set apart for weekly society. I therefore dropped the attempt; restricting myself to dinner parties, where, if the number of the Muses was sometimes doubled, it was only to include a few political aspirants forming themselves in the noblest of schools. Mine was perhaps the only dinner-table in London which politics did not just then convert into an arena of loud and graceless contention. For I plead guilty to the narrowness of my soul; I never *did* invite a Pittite within my doors! Even Canning, by whose brilliancy I was fascinated, did not seduce me into extending my circle for the reception of a man in many respects so liberal, but in more than one, the bitter opponent of my friends.

The London world was as yet scarcely acquainted with the man whose star of literary glory has in latter times

superseded the whole galaxy illuminating my youth; one, among whose numerous triumphs was the infusion of liberality into Toryism, and the obliteration in his own person of party prejudice; in whom we too reverentially loved the man, not to forget the politician,—the every way admirable Walter Scott. Some years after the epoch of which I write, I met him in friendly intimacy at Bentley Priory, and found in him (with less indeed of the polished courtliness induced by foreign travel) the cordial simplicity of Fox. With my friend, the Marchioness of Abercorn, Scott kept up a familiar correspondence; and it was in one of his letters to her, twenty years before the secret was publicly revealed, he first announced the series of Waverley Novels illustrative of the history of his native country.

But though literary distinction, rather than political, guided my choice in the formation of my Stanhope-street circle, it must be admitted that politics formed just then a superstition, of which the votaries were scarcely less frantic in their excesses, than the devotees of some ancient orgie. Men wrangled and drank, and drank and wrangled, almost as vehemently as during the reign of Wilkes and Liberty. Peace or War stood in place of Whig or Tory; and while Napoleon went conquering on, unimpeded even by his own dignities, Europe suffered its royal worms to be pecked up, one by one, by the Imperial eagle.

At length, maugre Port wine and its potent influence, even wrangling, even argument, was hushed into solemn silence. Austerlitz was fought, and with Austerlitz came the death of one who, whatever might be its verdict upon his prejudices as a statesman, the world was compelled to number among its *illustrissimi*. William Pitt died early in the winter of 1806, a man of exemplary integrity and sternest faculties; and the depression of the public mind, over which only a few weeks before the august spectacle of the interment of our greatest naval warrior had cast a gloom, was thus grievously renewed. Nelson and Pitt were gone! According to the lines of Moore "Star after star was decaying;" and the evil days upon which we had fallen, or rather to which we had gradually progressed, inspired the friends and adherents of Fox with apprehensions of a far more painful bereavement.

In the month of February, a crisis long foreseen placed

at the head of the new ministry Lord Grenville and Charles James Fox; when a rainbow instantly expanded in the political sky. Peace and the name of Fox were inseparably connected in the mind of the nation. But a lapse of two and twenty years, since he formed part of his Majesty's councils, had creared such more than chaotic confusion in our relations with the Continent, and the condition of the Continent itself, that the task of reconciling interests, far as the poles asunder, was likely to defy even the Herculean efforts of a mind so poweful as that of my friend. The question of the despairing Macduff, "Stands Scotland where it did?" might have been parodied by the native of many an European country, which if not "almost ashamed to know itself," caused others to blush for its pusillanimous subjection. Still, the necessity for peace was imminent. The monstrous power of France, generated under the system of Pitt, seemed, like the dragon charmed by Jason, only capable of being crushed when reduced to inaction; and negotiations were accordingly commenced with the French minister for foreign affairs, from which the nation sanguinely anticipated a term to its disasters.

But when, in my secret meditations upon these overtures, I recollected that the task was so unevenly distributed, as between Charles Maurice *Prince de Bonevente* and Charles James, *still* only Charles James Fox, I anticipated all that followed! The good faith of Fox was not on the look out for pitfalls where a fair and open territory courted his advance; and believing the other high contracting party to be progressing like himself in a right line, he found Talleyrand at the extremity of a zigzag, when he himself had reached the goal. The name of Russia was used as a scape-goat; and the inexperience of Lord Yarmouth as a diplomatist adduced by the French government as a plea for the protraction of the negotiation. But when the wary, Scotch-headed, Lauderdale, blundered over the same ground, it became evident to all the world as it had been from the first to myself, that Talleyrand had achieved his object in gaining time, while *we* had lost time and gained nothing.

At Easter, when roaming with Fox in the shrubberies of St. Anne's, where the Albermarles and Fitzpatrick as well as myself were passing the holidays, I predicted a

continuance of the war, with all the laughing defiance of opinionativeness which is a woman's substitute for argument; but I was stopped in a moment by the gravity of countenance with which *he*, formerly so playful, rebuked my levity. He bade me reflect upon the interests of suffering humanity; and proved by a few of those energetic phrases which fell from his lips like the bolt from the thunder-cloud, that his care for his own political triumph on the occasion was as a grain of sand weighed against the welfare of the people!

"Nay," I remonstrated, "there is surely no such desperation in the case? Pitt is gone, and you have time enough before you."

"*Time?*" reiterated Fox, turning towards me a countenance of mingled majesty and sweetness. "Who shall say that he has time before him? Pitt went in January, perhaps I may go in June!"

I attributed this movement of despondency to the shock he was then experiencing in the death of his treasured friend, the Duchess of Devonshire; but on referring afterwards to Mrs. Fox, she admitted that our friend was overtasking his strength, and that symptoms of latent disorder were appearing. Scarcely had he returned to the Stable-yard, (where the mansion of the Duke of Bedford had been appropriated to his use during the absence of his Grace as Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland) when these symptoms took a still more decided turn; and soon, alas! the secret of Fox's indisposition transpired to the public.

Ere, however, it took that fatal form which struck despair into the bosoms of all who loved him, a parliamentary triumph was reserved for him, which would surely suffice to inscribe his name in the everlasting chronicles of fame; a triumph renounced by Pitt, but appreciated by his great political rival, less as a legislator than as a man. A pledge for the extinction of the slave trade extorted from both houses of Parliament, called forth the last display of those oratorical powers, which were never exercised save in the cause of benevolence and virtue.

From that period, though his mind withdrew not from the arbitration of public affairs, he retired almost entirely from the public eye. Lords Fitzwilliam, Gray and Robert Spencer, General Fitzpatrick and myself, were almost the

only persons admitted to his presence, beyond the circle of that devoted family comprehending his wife, his nephew, and niece. The whole town came pressing to his door with inquiries; the Prince sent daily messages of the most anxious nature; but the irritating nature of his disease rendered quiet too indispensable to admit of visiters.

"I cannot talk to you," murmured he one day, when I took a chair beside his sofa; but I will think unreservedly in your presence; a compliment secondary only to conversation."

A smile was upon his lips has he spoke. But those lips were now often livid, often distorted by suffering. Dropsy was one of the painful symptoms of his disease. He underwent an operation; and in the exhaustion which followed, new terrors presented themselves to our minds.

It was an admirable thing to behold, in every brief respite from pain, with what zeal this truly great man devoted himself to the regulation of those portions of public business which were likely to suffer by his estrangement from office; and how often during paroxysms of pain, he strove to subdue the sense of torment by fixing his attention on favourite passages of classic authors, read aloud to him by his secretary or friends! Even myself he sometimes admitted to the delight of administering to his amusement; and having acquired from Lord Rawborne a fluency in the Italian language, (far inferior I admit to that displayed by my auditor,) he would place Tasso, Ariosto, or Metastasio in my hands, and so eagerly follow the meaning of the poet, as often to rectify my blunders. The attention of the amiable sufferer was far more keenly alive than my own!

One day, when I unexpectedly entered the room where he sat reclining in his easy chair, I discerned in a moment that his feelings had been excited by some unusual emotion.

"*Alone?*" cried I, dissatisfied to find him thus resigned to his solitary meditations.

"By choice!" was his reply. "I have persuaded Mrs. Fox to take some air. Holland and his sister are gone home to dinner. I *wanted* to be alone."

"You do not feel worse?"

He did not answer.—

"What did Vaughan and Pitcairn say to you this morning?"

"Assured me I was so much better, that I saw in a moment their opinion was unfavourable. I hastened therefore to perform a task which I felt would not bear procrastination."

Fancying he alluded to the settlement of his pecuniary affairs, I was silent.

"I have been to Holland House," said he, perceiving that I did not question him. "I wished to see the old place once more, as the hare returns to her form. It was in great beauty, just as I could have desired in bidding it farewell. Those favourite spots, endeared by so many boyish associations, by recollections of my father, mother, brother!——" He paused. For many minutes he was silent; nor did I presume to interrupt his reverie. "*Well!*" murmured he at last, as if speaking to himself, "Their ambition is fulfilled. I die at the post they wished to assign me."

To divert his thoughts from these melancholy retrospections, I adverted to St. Anne's, a name which possessed a peculiar charm for the ear of its partial master; inquiring whether he did not think of removing thither so soon as his recovery from the effects of the operation would permit.

"Such is my earnest desire," he replied. "But they will not hear of it. I shall be too far, they think, from medical advice. The Duke of Devonshire has *kindly* offered me Chiswick, for my convalescence; and in a few days I shall be there."

I thought the place ill-chosen. With all its beauty and interest, Chiswick was just then saddened to the mind of every friend of the lamented Georgiana. A spell of evil seemed to be over its walls: alas! how soon to be attested by the death of Fox, and more recently by the death of the only statesman* who, from that period till the present, has merited from the nation the appellation of great.

* Canning.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was at the end of July, that Fox removed to the villa of the Duke of Devonshire; and there, a few days afterwards, I visited him previous to my departure to my own residence at Sunning Hill. For gladly as I would have remained in town to watch over the declining days of a friend so venerated, I had no pretext for aspiring to the privilege. With such tender nurses as Mrs. Fox and his niece,—such filial attendance as that of Lord Holland,—and such companions as Lord Robert and Fitzpatrick, I could not presume to fancy myself in request.

Still less, after I had seen him installed at Chiswick. The excitement arising from change of air and scene effected wonders. He was able to move about again; and when I entered the saloon, of which the blinds were partially closed in consequence of the heat of the day, I found him contemplating the celebrated picture of "Belisarius," which adorns that cabinet of gems. It was impossible not to call to mind the scene recorded by the secretary of the renowned French Minister, the all-potent Cardinal, who was found a few days prior to his death wandering at daybreak through his gorgeous galleries, and bidding a reluctant farewell to these glorious chef-d'œuvres of art. Of how different a nature was the interest displayed by Fox in similar objects; not as being his property; but from a sympathy between the poetry of *their* nature and his own.

"I am better," said he, before I could inquire after his health, for well did he know what feeling was strongest in my mind. "I have still, perhaps, some months to wear out the patience of my friends, and obstruct the march of public business."

From public business, however, he was now virtually disconnected. He had almost ceased to interest himself in the crab-like progress of Lord Lauderdale, who was still at Paris; for a quasi new ministry, under the tutelage of that man of method and mechanism, Lord Grenville, was already taking measures of its own.

With neither Grenville nor Grey, had Fox, at *that* momdnt, any vivid sympathy. With Sheridan, still less; for he saw him but once, and that on terms of coldness and constraint, after his own accession to power; and most of his personal and political friends were dispersed for the summer. He was alone with his family and intimates; and what man was ever more warmly surrounded by those ties of kindred, endeared and embellished by his manly tenderness of nature!

I accompanied him that afternoon in a tour of the grounds, round which he was drawn in a garden-chair by a favourite servant; pausing, now and then, to point out to me some rare and beautiful flower; and more than once to advert to *her*, by whom the spot had been favoured, and who occupied so high a place in our mutual admiration and regret.

"The kindest of human hearts!" was the expression of Fox, in referring to the late Duchess. "The best-bred woman in London!" had been the ejaculation of the Prince on learning her death:—in each, how characteristic an exclamation!

Had I imagined when, accompanied by Mrs. Fox I sauntered beside the garden chaise round those green lawns and musky shrubberies, that I was looking on the majestic countenance of the distressed and feeble invalid for the last time, with what deep emotion should I have listened to every word that fell from his lips! But the physician announced no immediate danger. I promised myself very shortly to return and assure myself personally of his progress; and after an hour or two of bald disjointed chat, took leave of him, wholly unwarned, alas! by those presentiments, which one sometimes fancies to have been premonitory of an everlasting farewell.

"When do you go to Sunning?" he inquired, as he held my hand at parting. "I have a commission to give you for *my* part of the world."

"To-morrow. Is there any thing I can do for you? Do you wish me to drive over to St. Anne's?"

He replied by an almost playful affirmative movement of the head. "I want you to say something civil for me to my roses," said he. "I feel as if I had been faithless to St. Anne's in coming hither; but St. Anne's must remember that it was not the minister who forsook it—but

the dying man!" And in a low voice, whose inflection I shall never forget, he repeated to me the lines addressed by Tasso in prison to a brother poet:—

Tu, che ne vai in Pindo,
Ove pende mia cetra ad un cipresso,—
Salutala in mio nome, e dille poi
Ch'io son dagli anni e da fortuna oppressa!

I promised to do his spiriting as gently as its nature seemed to demand; and on my arrival at home, did indeed drive over, one melancholy morning to St. Anne's. It was a heavy sultry day—the river ran like a stream of lead. The roses, to which he had addressed those plaintive adieus, had already shed their summer bloom. The grass was parched up in the pastures. All was sad—all withered.—The place seemed conscious that the master-spirit was passing away.

It was on my return home from that very drive, that I was summoned to Spetchingley, by an earnest letter from Clara, acquainting me with the dangerous illness of my brother. His disorder, a typhus fever, threatened a duration that demanded my aid in nursing him. I went without hesitation: it was only fitting that at such an epoch of general desolation, when the death-bell of the great and glorious was never silent, I should have nothing before my eyes but sights of terror and affliction. Harry was insensible when I arrived,—remained many days insensible,—many days in hopeless danger; and while that misery continued, I had no thought to bestow, even on the impending national calamity. When my brother was pronounced out danger, and I recovered myself sufficiently to examine the newspapers, I found the state of Mr. Fox announced as progressively worse. A second operation was contemplated.

I now felt the improbability that I should behold again, on this side of the grave, the august friend of Fitzirnham, the revered of my own soul; and wept in bitter self-recrimination that I had not hallowed to myself by some warmer endearment our parting interview. Like Michael Angelo grieving after his last interview with Vittoria Colonna, I reproached myself with coldness. I wrote to his secretary,—I wrote to Mrs. Fox; but alas! so many were the

claimants for intelligence from every quarter of the kingdom, that only a few lines tended to confirm my worst apprehensions. The operation produced no permanent benefit. Lord Holland and General Fitzpatrick had taken up their abode at Chiswick. The last blow was at hand.

Still, during his intervals of anguish, his cheerfulness returned. He loved to be read to—talked to; he loved to look on the faces still so dear to him, but often averted from his examination, lest he should read in their sadness his sentence of condemnation.

My brother, meanwhile, supported by the force of a constitution unbroken by excess, was rapidly recovering; and great as was the diversity of their political opinions, it is impossible to describe with what interest he daily questioned me concerning the state of things at Chiswick.—"God preserve him! The country cannot in its present crisis do without him," was the adjuration of one who justly anticipated the diversity of councils about to follow his removal.

"I trust it will not be long, my dear Lady Rawborne, before you are able to dispose of your time," wrote General Fitzpatrick, a few days after this. "Our friend has more than once expressed a wish to see you; and, alas! the wishes he has to express upon earth are already numbered. Vaughan admits that we have not many days to keep him with us here."

The swollen eyes with which I visited my brother after the perusal of this grievous announcement, apprized him that something was amiss; and on hearing my intelligence, Harry insisted that, without a moment's delay, I should set off to town. With a heavy heart, I complied; and early the next morning reached London. Within a few miles of town, I passed the Prince of Wales, in an open carriage, on his way, as I afterwards found, to Lord Stafford's, at Trentham; and at the rapid pace he was proceeding, did not expect to be recognised. To my great surprise, however, (for we had not met since the fête at Stowe, three years before, where I passed some days in agreeable intimacy with him, the Devonshires, and Fox,) his Royal Highness ordered the carriages to stop; and, as if aware that a single topic ought at that moment to engage the minds of both, informed me that the consultation of physicians at

Chiswick had tried a new medicine, the digitalis, often used in cases of dropsy; that the effect was most disastrous; that our beloved friend had barely existed through the preceding night; that he could not survive the day!

I trembled too much even to reply! Instead of pausing for a few moments in town, I proceeded at once to Chiswick. It was the 13th of September, the ever lamentable 13th of September! As I drove through Hyde Park, at that season deserted, I heard the Tower guns firing, and cared not to inquire for what. The capture of Buenos Ayres was nothing to *me!* All I desired was to reach Chiswick.

On turning to the road leading towards the Burlington Villa, a straggling crowd of silent and sorrow-struck people, evidently collected by the apprehension of some mighty calamity, rendered it difficult for the carriage to proceed. Other carriages, too, formed a line towards the house; and when at last I attained the fatal gates, I noticed the liveries of Lord Fitzwilliam, the Spencers, and all the intimate friends of Fox, in attendance on the carriages drawn up.

I alighted, and entered the lodge on foot. The porter's wife was weeping too bitterly to take heed of me. The first person I saw in the grounds was Lord Fitwilliam pacing up and down with his eyes fixed upon the earth, under the shade of the very tree beneath which I had taken leave of our beloved friend. I saw how it was. That devoted friend had not courage to witness the afflicting scene passing within doors!

In another moment, I saw a gentleman (Mr. Bouverie, if I remember) approach, and whisper a few words to Lord Fitzwilliam; who, on comprehending them, staggered, and would have fallen to the ground, hand he not been supported by his companion. Instantly I rushed to the house; not a servant was visible; not a sound audible. Every thing seemed paralyzed by the dread event of the day! Hastening towards the room previously pointed out to me by Mrs. Fox as that of her husband, I found the door slightly ajar. The broken-hearted wife and niece had been that moment led from the chamber of death by his medical attendants; and Trotter the Irish secretary of Fox, stood alone by the bed-side, while a servant was closing the shutters against

the fading sunshine of an autumnal evening!—All—all was over!

I seem to see it now!—the tent-bed with its coverlid of pale green silk; above which appeared the immortalized countenance of one of the first of mortals. The breath appeared to have exhaled in a placid sigh, from his scarcely-parted lips; and the glorious expression of his face proclaimed, that Charles James Fox died as he had lived, full of resignation to the Almighty, full of peace and good-will towards mankind. * * *

A few weeks more, and the muffled bell of Westminster Abbey proclaimed that its portals were unclosed to welcome another of the great and glorious to its star-crowned caverns. Fast by those of his great rival in renown, the remains of Fox were laid to rest; eternal peace be with his ashes!—

A great multitude filled the aisles and avenues of the church. The whole kingdom bewailed him, not only as the noblest Roman of them all, but as the last. Already the ceremonial of his lying in state had attracted thousands to Stable Yard,—they seemed reluctant to part from even the vain pageantry of death!

* * * * *

Ed.—We have thus brought to a conclusion the portion which it is at present deemed advisable to offer to the public of the Memoirs of the late Lady ——. The remaining pages are chiefly filled with details relating to living characters, written in a spirit of sarcasm and bitterness, arising probably from the disappointments and vexations of old age. The death of Lady —— has admitted of the publication of the earlier portions of her Memoirs; the contemporaries of the Countess Dowager must have followed her to the grave, ere the remaining volumes can be added to the collection.

THE END.

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